City of Reading, Pennsylvania

Comprehensive Plan 2000

JUNE 2000

Comprehensive Plan 2000

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The Task Forces and membership lists can be found in Appendix B.

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Executive Summary

THE PROCESS

The City of Reading faces an uncertain and challenging future. It has reached the point in its growth and evolution when it is necessary to look at and plan for the future. Significant changes continue to occur at local and regional levels. Changing economics, shifting population bases, industrial plant closings, older housing stock and aging public facilities are headlines that appear in the news media every day. On the other hand, there are prospects for regional economic growth, collaboration and other potential opportunities that can be pursued.

The current Master Plan for the City of Reading was adopted in 1969. There were efforts in 1980 and 1986 to develop an updated plan, but support was limited and final drafts were never completed. In January 1997, the Reading Planning Commission suggested to the Mayor and City Council that the Commission and appropriate Planning staff develop a new Comprehensive Plan and related Strategic Action Plan. The recommendation was endorsed by the Administration, and the Planning Commission identified several critical objectives to be included in the creation of the new plan. These have been summarized in the following Mission Statement:

> "The Comprehensive Plan for Reading serves as a formally adopted statement of policies regarding the City's future. It provides a framework for public and private decisions that impact the prioritization of resource allocation, increases neighborhood and business stability, and improves the overall quality of life. The document can also serve as a guide to address changing human and physical environments, strengthen community confidence and involvement, provide investment security, preserve and enhance the positive qualities of Reading, and reinforce the City as a regional hub."

In June 1997, City Council directed the Planning Commission and appropriate staff of the Community Development Department to prepare a Comprehensive Plan and Strategic Action Plan for Reading.

A group of City residents and business people was assembled in the Fall of 1997 to serve on the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee. This Committee was responsible for supervising the planning process, to assure that the diverse needs of the community were addressed in the document. The Advisory Committee worked with Planning staff to develop a process outline and a projected timeline.

The public outreach phase began in January 1998 and involved 29 neighborhood meetings throughout the City. In addition, questionnaires were distributed through selected public schools, at various drop-box locations and in the Reading Eagle/Times newspapers. Public input from these sources was collected and six task forces were established to address the expressed concerns:

- LAND USE AND TRANSPORTATION
- RECREATION AND LEISURE
- HOUSING
- BUSINESS AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
- QUALITY OF LIFE
- REGIONALISM

Like the Advisory Committee, the task forces consisted of volunteers from the community as well as at least one member from the Advisory Committee, the City Planning Commission and the Community Development Staff. The task forces reviewed the issues outlined at the public meetings and in the questionnaires; identified the most critical concerns; and developed policy statements to address the selected issues. Completed in July 1998, the final report of the task

forces also identified appropriate goals to support the policies and outlined strategies to achieve the higher priority goals.

During the Summer of 1999, staff worked to develop a format for the final draft and identified additional issues. Over the past several months, the staff has expanded and built on the task force reports to create this final draft of the Comprehensive Plan 2000.

THE POLICY PLAN

Reading's Comprehensive Plan 2000 is comprised of eight chapters. Chapter One provides a brief history of the City and a review of planning efforts during the past 40 years. Chapters Two through Eight examine the wider range of issues and policies regarding Land Use, Transportation, Community Services and Facilities, Population and Housing, Business and Workforce Development, Quality of Life and Regionalism. These elements evolved from neighborhood meetings, survey questionnaires, task force reports, staff input and requirements of the State Municipalities Planning Code. Some recommendations are quite specific and detailed, but several general themes emerged regarding the future of Reading.

The overall fiscal health of the City must be improved. Reading's tax base is declining as properties are abandoned, property assessments are appealed and the number of tax-exempt properties increase. Appropriate development of vacant or underutilized tracts of land must be encouraged. The reuse of former industrial sites would help to expand the City's economic base and increase employment opportunities. Additional revenue sources and assistance must be explored and utilized.

Greater efforts are necessary to deter crime and drug-related activities, as well as improve perceptions of the city. Although incidents of serious crime have been reduced in recent years, drug activity and street crime continue to be real concerns. Building deterioration and the accumulation of trash can contribute to an adverse perception of neighborhood safety. Vacant, dilapidated structures must be rehabilitated or removed, street lighting must be improved and trash needs to be cleaned up. Police presence should be increased when possible and the Crime Watch program should be supported and expanded.

Reading's residential neighborhoods need to be reinvigorated and housing stock stabilized. Housing density must be reduced in some residential neighborhoods with narrow streets and undersized properties. Blighted properties are disincentives for neighborhood reinvestment and need to be repaired or demolished. Streetscape improvements and public space attractiveness add to a sense of pride. The value of historic districts as a source of neighborhood pride needs to be marketed. The convenience and housing value in urban neighborhoods needs to be promoted. Home ownership programs should be supported and expanded.

The overall quality of the urban environment needs to be protected and enhanced. The character of the natural and built environment has a direct impact on the quality of life in the City. Natural features such as mountain reserves, wetlands and waterways must be respected and preserved. Open space and outdoor recreation areas should be conserved and cared for. Incompatible land uses need to be buffered or removed. Reading's rich architectural heritage needs to be protected and maintained. The cleanliness and overall appearance of the City's streetscapes must be improved. Upgrades to traffic circulation can reduce congestion, increase safety and improve air quality.

The City needs to become an equitable partner in the region to build a successful future. Many people who live outside Reading do not believe that they have an interest in the future success of the City. Recent trends and initiatives have demonstrated that the City's health will continue to have an impact on the entire region. The downtown needs to be strengthened as a center for finance, government, law, transportation, entertainment and cultural activities. Municipal services should continue to be extended beyond the City limits as capacities allow. Non-residents should share the costs of City services and facilities that are used by the whole region. Recreational facilities that are part of a regional system could be incorporated into a comprehensive maintenance program for increased efficiency. The rehabilitation and reuse of urban properties and buildings could reduce the need for continued suburban sprawl.

Strategic Action Plan

The City's Comprehensive Plan 2000 identifies the important issues and policies that need to be addressed. The next step in the process is to define the elements of the Strategic Action Plan, which will outline strategies and actions to implement the highest priority recommendations.

Chapter One
Historical Background

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CITY

Relatively little is known of the Native American settlements that were located on land now occupied by the City of Reading. As the Lenni Lenâpe tribe occupied this part of the country, the settlements were likely seasonal rather than permanent, a pattern that is consistent with the semi-nomadic lifestyle of these people. All of what is now the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania was granted to William Penn by King Charles II of England as repayment of a debt owed to Penn's father. Unusual for his time, Penn believed that the real "owners" of his new territory were the original inhabitants. Upon his arrival in the New World, he proceeded to bargain with the native peoples for the right to the property granted him by the Crown. Consequently, the early history of Pennsylvania is notably free from the battles with natives that characterize the European settlement of most of the United States.

The European settlement of Reading did not begin until the 1730's, when it was first divided into six tracts of land. These parcels later become part of a plan for the "Towne of Reading" proposed in 1743 by William Penn's sons Richard and Thomas. The Penn brothers named the town after Reading in Berkshire, England, the ancestral "shire" of the Penn family. Officially laid out in 1748, Reading's original plan featured 520 lots and 204 out lots in a grid pattern as well as two principal streets.

Penn Street, named for William Penn, was laid out in an east-to-west orientation perpendicular the Schuylkill River, and incorporated part of the Tulpehocken Road that connected Philadelphia and Harrisburg. What are now the 400 and 500 blocks of Penn Street were historically called Market Street, since those blocks were the location of farmers' markets until 1871. Conrad Weiser, a prominent figure in the County's early history, operated the City's first general store on a lot purchased in 1749 along Penn Street. Callowhill Street, currently known as Fifth Street, was named after Hannah Callowhill, William Penn's second wife. It is laid out in a north-south direction, intersecting Penn Street at right angles. Most streets in the new "Towne" were originally given the names of royal titles and those of Richard and Thomas Penn, receiving their present names in 1833.

When the County of Berks was created in 1752, Reading became the County seat. The original Courthouse was erected in 1762 in what is now Penn Square. Reading grew, becoming an incorporated borough in 1783, a city in 1847, and a Third Class City – its current status – in 1874. Transportation and its effects were largely responsible for Reading's early growth. Ferries were used to cross the Schuylkill River until the first bridge was built in 1810 downstream of what is now the Schuylkill Avenue Bridge. In 1817, the first Penn Street Bridge was built, followed by a bridge at Bingaman Street in 1831. The first major roads to connect Reading with other cities were turnpikes. The Centre Turnpike Company, incorporated in 1805, built a road to the north, the Perkiomen and Reading Turnpike (1810) led southeast, and the Berks and Dauphin Turnpike (1817) headed west. Stagecoaches provided inter-city trans-portation along these and other routes between 1786 and 1838. By the late 1820's, two canals served Reading, establishing the City as a halfway point in the system of canals linking the Susquehanna River with the Delaware River. The Schuylkill Navigation Canal, connecting Reading and Philadelphia, was completed in 1824; the Union Canal was in operation by 1828.

The relative ease of movement afforded by these early "highways" resulted in a period of industrial growth during the first half of the 19th Century. The City's early industry consisted of smaller enterprises in trades, crafts, and light manufacturing. Local factories produced beer, cigars, shoes, and boots. Reading was also a thriving center for hat making: in 1806, there were 40 hat factories in the City.

Reading developed rapidly between 1825 and 1850. The Industrial Revolution of the 1830's brought to this country the invention of steam-powered machinery and a surge of advances in heavy industry and transportation. The new railroads were so successful that the stagecoaches and the new canal system were unable to compete and were eventually abandoned. The largest local railroad was the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad. Incorporated in 1833, the Philadelphia and Reading constructed the first rail line from Reading to Pottstown in 1837. This line was extended to Philadelphia in 1839. The company originally built the line to ship coal from Pennsylvania's anthracite region to the markets and ports of the eastern seaboard: there was no passenger service until the 1840's. The Philadelphia and Reading eventually became one of the largest railroad industries in the nation, and was – briefly – the largest industrial corporation in the world just prior to the Civil War. It was an industry unto itself, constructing its own railroad shops where the first coal-burning engine was designed and built. Other early industries included the Reading Iron and Nail Works and the Carpenter Steel Mills, along with hosiery and knitting mills, hardware production, foundries, machine works and flour mills. Other factories produced a variety of goods including bricks, furniture, combs and brushes, and pianos. The Civil War period brought greater demand for goods, causing factories to increase in size as well as number.

The jobs provided by the railroad and the City's many other thriving industries were a powerful attraction to new immigrants seeking work. Reading's original population was largely of German heritage. Now, immigrants from Ireland, Poland, Italy and the Ukraine settled in the southern part of the City, right among the factories where they worked. As the immigrants and laborers settled in the southern part of the City, the introduction of the trolley in 1874 allowed Reading's wealthy industrialists to move north, building their Victorian-era mansions along Centre Avenue and establishing that neighborhood as one of Reading's first suburbs.

The boundaries of the City grew to the north and south, and by the late 1860's, the City limits included most of what is now the heart of the City. The Riverdale, Northmont, and Glenside neighborhoods were added in the early 1900's along with the 18th Ward and an area of Mt. Penn. The City achieved its current configuration in the late 1960's.

At the dawn of the 20th Century, Reading was a major manufacturing center. As the City's population grew, technological advancement led to modern industry and the manufacturing of machinery and automobiles. Retail activity became important, and the City had several large department stores. In 1923, there were 700 manufacturing institutions producing more than 300 different kinds of goods. Reading boasted the largest brick kiln in the country and was an important center for both hosiery manufacture and the production of builder's hardware.

The economic depression of the 1930's affected the City just as it did the entire nation. However, the railroad and its related industries fared better than most because the rails were still used to move most basic commodities. The Depression still marked the beginning of the City's seven-decade decline in prominence as a population and manufacturing center. The 1930 Census reported that the City was home to 111,171 people, or 48% of all Berks County resid-ents, a peak that has never been equaled since.
With its concentration of heavy industry, Reading was an important center during World War II. Despite the high demand for labor both during and after the war, the population continued to drop. When the war was over, the boom in housing and highway construction enabled many families to leave the City for the new suburbs. The effect this had on Reading is discussed in more detail in the chapter on Housing and Population.

The 1940's, 1950's, and early 1960's were a particularly colorful era for the City of Reading as it gained a reputation as a haven for illegal gambling activity and attendant political corruption. The City achieved such notoriety that it became the focus of a 1966 investigation by the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice. In 1967, the Com-mission produced a document entitled, *Wincanton: The Politics of Corruption,* with "Wincanton" being a thinly disguised Reading. However, by the time the report was finally issued, most of the principal players (easily recognizable to City residents despite the fictional names given by the authors) were either in jail or dead, and one of Reading's more shameful chapters had been closed.

The 1960's and 1970's were marked by the effect of Federal urban renewal programs upon the City. Although it later became fashionable to criticize the effects of the wholesale demolition and reconstruction that these programs sponsored, there is little doubt that Reading gained some clear benefits. Large areas of old, dilapidated and dense development in the downtown area was cleared and replaced with new structures or surface parking. These accomplishments are discussed in detail in the next section of this chapter. The redevelopment effort was further "assisted" in June 1973 by Hurricane Agnes, which brought the most serious flooding the City had ever experienced. The low-lying areas along Riverfront Drive were destroyed, clearing the way for the Reading Area Community College campus and the industrial development that now occupy these lands.

The widespread demolition funded by Federal urban renewal programs may have contributed to a "backlash" in provoking a nationwide resurgence of interest in urban areas and their history. Reading felt some of this interest, and in 1978, the City received a grant from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) to conduct a historical sites survey of the entire City. It was recognized that preservation of Reading's historic resources was vital in maintaining Reading's large inventory of early 20th Century structures and that significant elements of the City's historical integrity were being lost through the effects of demolition and "misguided" (i.e., historically inappropriate) improvements. The survey identified no fewer than 23 potential historic districts within the City. In the late 1970's and early 1980's, three historic districts were established in Reading: Callowhill, Centre Park, and Prince. To protect the Districts' historic resources, a Historic District Ordinance was adopted and a Historical Architectural Review Board (HARB) was established.

In 1991, the City of Reading Charter Study Commission was elected to study the existing commission form of government, and to determine whether becoming a Home Rule Charter City would be more economical or efficient. The Commission's study concluded that the City would benefit with a "strong mayor" form of home-rule government. The City electorate endorsed this recommendation and a new City Charter was drafted. The new charter took effect in January 1996.

In 1998, Reading celebrated its 250th Anniversary, based on the year that Thomas and Richard Penn first laid out the City. The year-long bicenquinquagenary celebration included a combined 250th Anniversary-Armed Forces Day parade, various projects by individual schools, celebrations by various ethnic groups, a commemorative train trip to Philadelphia, and the burying of a time capsule to be opened in 2048.

RECENT HISTORY OF PLANNING IN READING

During the past 40 years, there have been numerous planning initiatives in the City of Reading designed to guide public and private investment. In the late 1950's, the Walnut Street Project eliminated the deteriorated, dense residential development in the block bounded by Walnut, Poplar, Washington and Reed Streets. This demolition provided space for the expansion of the Central YMCA, the Walnut Street Pavilion of St. Joseph Hospital, and a major off-street parking garage.

During the 1960's, Court Street was widened between Third and Ninth Streets, and Cherry Street was widened between Fourth and Ninth Streets. These improvements helped to facilitate service access to the rear of Penn Street properties. The Court Street project also helped to promote the development of Washington Towers, Plaza Madrid, the WEEU Building and eventually the Chiarelli Plaza parking garage. The Cherry Street Project provided land for the Fourth and Cherry Streets Garage, off-street parking in the 600 block of Cherry Street, the South Penn Garage, Franklin Plaza, and the Rhodes and Eisenhower residential high-rises.

The Riverfront Urban Renewal Area was created in 1968 to revitalize the general area bound by Second Street, the Penn Street Bridge, and the Schuylkill River where there was an incompatible mix of industry, railroad and high-density residential uses in deteriorated condition. This area is presently the home of RACC, Penske, Competition Tire, Remcon Plastics and the City's Third and Spruce Recreation Center.

The following year, in 1969, the City Planning staff completed the Community Renewal Program (CRP), which took an in-depth look at different components of the City: Community Facilities and Services; Social, Economic, Physical Environment; Housing; Blight and Deterioration; and the Program Implementation Plan. The 1969 Master Plan, adopted in November 1969, was a direct result of this study. Many of the more detailed plans that have been developed since have relied upon the 1969 Master Plan to some degree. These subsequent efforts included planning for urban renewal areas, neighborhood studies and downtown strategies.

The Downtown East Urban Renewal Plan of 1971 proposed an enclosed shopping mall in downtown Reading between Sixth and Eighth Streets, from Cherry Street north to Court Street, to compete with shopping malls being built in the suburbs. In 1973, Penn Square was designated an urban renewal area and a plan was developed to beautify the 400 and 500 blocks of Penn Street as a landscaped entrance to the enclosed downtown mall. When it became apparent that the economics of the downtown shopping mall could not work and the project developer withdrew the proposal, the City contracted with Sasaki Associates in 1976 to prepare a revised plan for Downtown East, which concentrated on incremental block development. Most of the development within the Downtown East Urban Renewal Area since then has been consistent with the concepts of the Sasaki Plan, particularly in the area between Penn and Court Streets, from Sixth to Seventh Street. The Sasaki Plan is still used as a basis for evaluating proposed projects for the north side of the 700 block of Penn Street.

Floods generated by Hurricane Agnes in June 1972 caused major damage in Reading. In 1973, the Schuylkill and Model Cities One Urban Renewal Plans were developed to address the redevelopment of flooded areas in the northwest and southwest areas of the City. Both projects have been almost completely built-out.

Also in 1973, the City Planning staff produced neighborhood development studies for the Riverdale, Glenside, Near Northwest and Northeast Industrial areas of the City. These reports were intended to expand on the recommendations of the 1969 Master Plan. The Near Northwest Neighborhood Development Study provided a general template for the development of the

Schuylkill Renewal Area and served as a guide for public improvements provided in the Near Northwest Renewal Plan (1975) for the area north of Buttonwood Street and west of North Second Street. Major planning efforts in the Near Northwest continued in 1985, with the development of revitalization plans by the Planning Office for the 400 block of Schuylkill Avenue. The project was completed in 1986 and included the complete rehabilitation of fourteen houses, off-street parking facilities and public improvements to the streetscape. More recently, the Buttonwood Gateway Redevelopment Area was established in the Near Northwest late in 1998. This area, which is also one of the City's three officially recognized brownfield sites, was established to facilitate redevelopment of vacant and dilapidated industrial sites for new industrial development.

The Northeast Industrial Neighborhood Development Study of 1973 was the basis for the creation of the Northeast Industrial Renewal Area in 1976. Located south of Hiester's Lane and west of Kutztown Road, the vacant land was aggregated, improvements were made to the physical infrastructure, and new parcels designated for light industrial and commercial development. Sweet Street Desserts is one major business that located in this area. The City commissioned the Urban Research and Development Corporation (URDC) in 1992 to conduct an expanded study of the Northeast Industrial area. This study proposed a new industrial park for the area bounded by Kutztown Road, Rockland, North Eleventh, and Bern Streets, as well as the eastern side of North Eleventh Street from Richmond Street south to mid-block between Bern and Exeter Streets.

In 1974, the Comprehensive Community Plan Task Force published its preliminary summary report. This report described a long-range plan to identify problems and potentials in Reading and to propose ways that the public and private sectors of the community could address these issues. The Task Force was composed of fourteen representatives of the community who held over fifty meetings, seventeen of which were public hearings, in addition to numerous field interviews and receipt of written comments. Many issues identified in the report have been addressed over the years; others are still relevant today.

From 1974 to 1977, Neighborhood Development Studies were published by the Planning staff for South Reading, the North Central Railroad, Downtown North and Penn's Commons neighborhoods. Some recommendations in these reports resulted in public and private reinvestment in these areas.

The Planning staff began an update of the 1969 Master Plan in 1979 and completed, but staff reduction terminated the process. A Citywide Land Use and Conditions Survey, as well as a comprehensive Historical Sites Survey were completed at this time. The Land Use/Conditions Survey has proven a valuable benchmark for comparison and analysis involving recent data, and it is utilized on an on a continuing basis. The Historical Sites Survey is also an essential resource in enforcing the Historic Preservation Ordinance – produced by Planning personnel as well – and enhancing the general preservation effort throughout the City.

In 1982, the Reading Downtown Development Strategy, Plan, and Program was completed by Zuchelli, Hunter & Associates, Inc. with the Mayor's Downtown Advisory Committee and the City Planning Office as the immediate clients. The report documented the consultant team's findings and recommendations concerning market analysis, parking analysis, and formulation of a development plan and program for downtown Reading. The concept followed the theme of "from the River to the Mountain" and illustrated activity nodes at River Place/Gateway (Second and Penn Streets), Penn Square, Civic Place (700 block Penn Street), and Mountain Place (Eleventh and

Penn Streets). Many concepts set forth in this document reinforced the recommendations of previous plans and neighborhood development studies.

In 1985, the Planning office developed the Downtown Implementation Strategies. These strategies illustrated various concepts for revitalization, modifying the recommendations of the 1982 Zuchelli Hunter report and defining the boundaries of the Central Business District more modestly. These concepts received the endorsement of the Downtown Advisory Committee, the Penn Square Commission, the Reading Marketing Association, the Reading Redevelopment Authority, the Reading Planning Commission, the Mayor and City Council.

The City hired the consulting firm of Wallace Roberts Todd (WRT) in 1986 to develop a new Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance for Reading. After considerable research, public input and discussion, a preliminary draft was completed in 1988. Following extensive staff review, a revised document was presented in 1989, but the budget was not sufficient to com-plete the final draft of the Comprehensive Plan. The WRT draft of the Zoning Ordinance was refined by the Planning staff and adopted by the City in 1995.

In 1989, Hyett-Palma of Washington, D. C. conducted a retail market profile and economic enhancement strategy for downtown Reading. The study presented specific strategies for business enhancement, business clustering, business recruitment, and customer recruitment. Recommendations included streetscape improvements, a downtown hotel, and improved security and maintenance measures. Most of these recommendations were subsequently implemented.

Wallace Roberts Todd, Landscape Architects, completed a design for downtown streetscape improvements in 1990. Improvements included new paving, lighting and street trees in the 200, 300, 900 and 1000 blocks of Penn Street. The Second and Penn Streets entrance to the City received new bridge lighting, identification signs, paving and landscaping. A plaza, featuring a statue dedicated to the firefighters of Reading, was built at the Eleventh and Penn Streets Gateway to downtown. Special paving, lighting, and landscaping were also installed. The City continued to employ some of the design elements introduced by the WRT landscape plan in more recent downtown development such as the renovation of City Hall, the redesign of Penn Square, the Market Square residential campus and First Union Commons. These same elements will be included in downtown development projects now under construction, such as the Civic Center, the BARTA (Berks Area Reading Transportation Authority) Intermodal Facility and the medical clinic on Penn Street to be operated by the Reading Hospital and Medical Center.

The City created the Penn Square Redesign Evaluation Committee in 1990 to explore the best options for re-opening the 500 block of Penn Square. The committee worked with Wallace Roberts Todd, Landscape Architects, for a year to develop the most appropriate design for Penn Square. When the City was unable to allocate funds for the approved concept, a new design for the Square, to include a Downtown Transportation Center, was proposed by BARTA utilizing Federal transportation funds. The City endorsed the new proposal and construction was completed in 1993.

In the mid-1990's the City Planning Commission revisited the idea of a Citywide Comprehensive Plan. Although the draft version of the WRT plan was relatively recent, it was incomplete. Furthermore, the Planning Commission wanted to do a plan with a greater emphasis on public participation in the initial phase and on implementation strategies in the final product. At the same time, this new document would need to comply with the requirements for a Comprehensive Plan as established by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in Act 247 of 1968, the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code. The City was unwilling to contract with another private consultant so soon after working with WRT, but City Council – at the request of the Planning Commission –

did agree in 1997 to set aside $10,000 over a two-year period to fund the creation of a new Comprehensive Plan. Work on the new document began in earnest in November 1997 when the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee met for the first time. This is the final product.

Chapter Two
Land Use

INTRODUCTION

Land use patterns determine the character and identity of a city as well as its individual neighborhoods. These patterns can be guided through land use regulations such as zoning, subdivision, land development and parcel controls in urban renewal areas. Reading's growth is characterized by the mixture of many land uses in a relatively small area. The land use plan for the City should provide for the variety of existing land uses while minimizing the potential conflicts between those that are incompatible. Since the amount of vacant land available for development in the City is minimal, there is an emphasis on policies regarding the conversion of existing structures and underutilized properties.

Reading's land use goals are directed towards its growth opportunities, the compatible reuse of marginal property, the strengthening of existing neighborhoods and the protection of historic and natural resources.

BACKGROUND

The City of Reading was founded in 1748 at a ford on the Schuylkill River where several roads converged near the lower slopes of Mt. Penn and Neversink Mountain. Many of the early settlers were farmers, but there were also some artisans and tradesmen. With the development of the canal system along the Schuylkill River, Reading became a major distribution center for agricultural products and raw manufacturing materials. The establishment of the region's railroad network encouraged the development of manufacturing and heavy industrial uses in the City. Reading rapidly evolved into the retail, office and manufacturing center of Berks County, as well as the home for most of the region's residents.

In the early 1900's, some commercial and manufacturing uses began relocating to the suburbs where there was more available, less expensive land, fewer restrictions on development and less congestion. More recently, certain retail and office uses have also moved from the City's central business district to the outlying areas.

Downtown Reading continues to be a central location for government services, banking institutions, social services, commercial and office use. The development of the Sovereign Center and the reuse of some underutilized properties provide opportunities to revitalize center-city.

Many of Reading's residential neighborhoods are stable and attractive. In some areas, housing density must be reduced and property conditions improved.

CURRENT LAND USE

The City of Reading presently covers an area of 6,394 acres or 9.99 square miles. Most of the land already has been developed or is dedicated as open space. Table 1 summarizes the land use categories, their acreage, percentage of each category and percentage of total area.

- The single largest land use in the City is **residential** which totals 1,760 acres, nearly 27.6% of the overall area. Single family attached and detached homes account for 76.2% of this

category. The remainder of residential use is made up of two-family homes (6.1%), three-family homes (2.6%) and multi-family structures (15.1%).

- **Commercial** uses occupy 599 acres or 9.3% of the City's area. Business establishments such as downtown or neighborhood retail stores, shops or restaurants make up 24.9% of this category. Consumer services and office uses account for 20% and 4.7% respectively. Highway commercial uses depend on a high volume of automobile traffic and represent 9.8% of all commercial uses. Heavy commercial use includes wholesaling and warehousing, and totals 40.6% of this category.
- **Industrial** land uses account for 530 acres or 8.3% of Reading's acreage. Properties occupied by utilities make up 5.3% and light industry represents 20.2% of the category. Heavy industrial use includes manufacturing, fabricating and assembly plants, adding up to 74.5% of this category.
- Public and non-profit uses take up 572 acres in the City, which is 9% of the total area. Government agencies, schools, religious organizations and non-profit agencies would be included in this category.
- There are 835 acres, or 13.1%, of City land dedicated for **outdoor recreation**. More than half of this amount, 56.3%, is made up of parks and playgrounds. The remaining acreage is found in the Mt. Penn Reserve, with 293 acres, and Neversink Mountain with 72 acres
- **Streets and alleys** account for 1,158 acres or more than 18% of Reading's total area. Another 129 acres of land are used exclusively far off-street parking facilities provided for the public, employees or customers.
- The **railroad** occupies 278 acres, or 4.3%, within the City limits. The north central railroad yards account for 142 acres while railroad rights-of-way throughout Reading make up the other 136 acres.
- The portions of the **Schuylkill River** and **Tulpehocken Creek** which flow through Reading total 140 acres or 2.2% of the City's area.
- Land use analysis shows 232 acres of **vacant** land remaining in Reading, a very low 3.6%. Some of this land is unsuitable for development as it may have steep topography, difficult access or be located in the flood plain.

TABLE 1

LAND USE (1998)

LAND USE	ACRES	PERCENT OF CATEGORY	PERCENT OF TOTAL
RESIDENTIAL		100.0	
1 Family Residential	1341	76.2	21.0
2 Family Residential	108	6.1	1.7

3 Family Residential	46	2.6	0.7
Multi-family	265	15.1	4.2
COMMERCIAL	599	100.0	9.3
Retail	149	24.9	2.3
Service	120	20.0	1.9
Office	28	4.7	0.4
Highway Commerical	59	9.8	0.9
Heavy Commerical	243	40.6	3.8
INDUSTRIAL	530	100.0	8.3
Utilities	28	5.3	0.4
Light Industry	107	20.2	1.7
Heavy Industry	395	74.5	6.2
PUBLIC AND QUASI-PUBLIC		100.0	9.0
OUTDOOR RECREATION		100.0	
Parks/Playgrounds	470	56.3	7.4
Mt. Penn Reserve	293	35.1	4.6
Neversink Reserve	72	8.6	1.1
CEMETERY		100.0	
TRANSPORTATION	1287	100.0	
Parking	129	10.0	2.0
Streets	1081	84.0	16.9
Alleys	77	6.0	1.2
RAILROAD		100.0	
North Central	142	51.1	2.2
RR ROW's	136	48.9	2.1
SCHUYLKILL RIVER & TULPEHOCKEN CREEK		100.0	
UNDEVELOPED		100.0	
TOTAL	6394	100.0	100.0

LAND USE PATTERNS

Land use distribution defines the physical form of the City and reflects it's various functions and activities. These patterns identify general use concentrations as well as areas characterized by mixed use. Map 1 provides a general inventory of Reading's current land use development. Since some areas of the City include a variety of uses, the following categories are illustrated on this map.

RESIDENTIAL, LOW DENSITY – Areas of one-family detached dwellings on relatively large lots.

RESIDENTIAL, MEDIUM DENSITY – Areas of one family detached, semi-detached and attached dwellings on modest lots.

RESIDENTIAL, HIGH DENSITY – Areas of one-family and two-family attached dwellings and multi-family development.

RESIDENTIAL, PROFESSIONAL OFFICE – Areas of one-family detached dwellings on relatively large lots and professional offices of similar scale and character.

NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL – Areas of business establishments that feature convenience shopping and personal services for a small local residential market.

RESIDENTIAL OUTLET – Areas of high-density residential development and retail outlet operations.

COMMERCIAL RESIDENTIAL – Areas of multi-family dwellings as well as offices, business services, consumer services, and smaller retail stores that relate to the Commercial Core.

COMMERCIAL CORE – Downtown center of government services, offices, shopping, hotels, entertainment and cultural activity.

HIGHWAY COMMERCIAL – Areas of businesses oriented towards automobile transportation or located along major roadways.

MANUFACTURING COMMERCIAL - Areas of light manufacturing, wholesaling, and retail activities.

MANUFACTURING – Areas of heavy industrial and commercial activity.

PUBLIC/INSTITUTIONAL – Community facilities such as government offices, schools, fire stations, and libraries located outside the Commercial Core.

PARKS/OPEN SPACE – Recreational facilities, mountain reserves and other permanent open space.

UNDEVELOPED LAND – Vacant land for potential redevelopment.

MAP 1 ON THIS PAGE (11” X 17”, COLOR)

LAND USE TRENDS

During the past 20 years, the major land use changes in the City of Reading have occurred through the development of vacant land and the conversion or redevelopment of existing uses. Table 2 illustrates the changes in major land use categories between 1978 and 1998 (see Appendix C for 1978 Land Use percentages). The amount of vacant land decreased by more than 43% during this interval for a current total of 232 acres. Another significant reduction was railroad use, which decreased by 77 acres or almost 22% as some of this land was reused for commercial or other industrial endeavors.

Residential land use increased by nearly 3% to a new total of 1760 acres, which accounts for over 27% of the City's area. Most of this increase was in one family residential (24 acres) and multi-family residential (25 acres). The increase in one-family residential was mostly a result of further development of scattered vacant lots in Riverdale and the 18th Ward as well as projects such as East Bank (6th Ward) and Castlewood. The development of the River Oak townhouses (6th Ward), the Wood Street Apartments, Constitution Terrace (South Fourth Street) and the conversion of the Villa St. Elizabeth into a personal-care facility account for much of the increase in multi-family residential use.

Commercial uses increased by 86 acres or nearly 17%, for a new total of almost 600 acres. Most of the 26% increase in retail use resulted from the construction of Reading Station Outlet. Heavy commercial uses grew by 12%, mostly from the reuse of railroad storeyards and carshops along North Sixth Street and new businesses in the Northeast Industrial Area. Highway commercial uses increased by 17 acres or more than 40% since 1978. The development of Rockland Plaza in the northeast and new businesses along North Fifth Street, between Amity and Bern Streets, contributed to most of this growth.

Although industrial uses exhibited only a modest gain of almost 5% during the 20-year period, light industry increased by 19 acres, a change in excess of 21%. Expansion of Baldwin Brass in the 18th Ward and new development in the Northeast Industrial Area accounted for much of this growth.

Outdoor Recreation grew by 85 acres, an increase of more than 11%. Most of this gain was a direct result of the expansion of the bikeway system and its connections by both the City and the Schuylkill River Greenway Association. New facilities included the Glenside Bikeway, Dana Memorial Park, Elm Street Walkway, Spruce Street Walkway, Heritage Park and the Thun Trail in the 18th Ward. The Berks County Conservancy and the Earl Estate acquired additional property for public use on Neversink Mountain.

TABLE 2

LAND USE TRENDS (1978 - 1998)

LAND USE	1978 (ACRES)	1998 (ACRES)	CHANGE (ACRES)	CHANGE (%)
Residential	1711	1760	49	2.9
1 Family Residential	1317	1341	24	1.8
2 Family Residential	109	108	-1	-0.9
3 Family Residential	45	46	1	2.2
Multi-family	240	265	25	10.4
COMMERCIAL	513	599	86	16.8
Retail	118	149	31	26.3
Service	114	120	6	5.3
Office	22	28	6	27.3
Highway Commercial	42	59	17	40.5
Heavy Commercial	217	243	26	12.0
INDUSTRIAL	506	530	24	4.7
Utilities	26	28	2	7.7
Light Industry	88	107	19	21.6
Heavy Industry	392	395	3	0.8
PUBLIC AND QUASI-PUBLIC	555	572	17	3.1
OUTDOOR RECREATION	750	835	85	11.3
Parks/Playgrounds	412	470	58	14.1
Mt. Penn Reserve	293	293	0	0.0
Neversink Reserve	45	72	27	60.0
CEMETERY	161	161	0	0
TRANSPORTATION	1292	1287	-5	-0.4
Parking	125	129	4	3.2
Streets	1090	1081	-9	-0.8
Alleys	77	77	0	0.0
RAILROAD	355	278	-77	-21.7
North Central	190	142	-48	-25.3
RR ROW's	165	136	-29	-17.6
SCHUYLKILL RIVER/TULPEHOCKEN CREEK	140	140	0	0
UNDEVELOPED	411	232	-179	-43.6
TOTAL	6,394	6,394		

LAND USE ISSUES AND POLICES

The main goals of the land use element of the Comprehensive Plan are to support the wide range of existing land uses, to minimize the adverse impact of conflicting uses, to help guide new development and to encourage the appropriate reuse of marginal or underutilized properties.

The issues and policies for land use are organized into sections regarding general patterns, residential neighborhoods, commercial areas, industrial concentrations, public and institutional uses, open space and recreation, and vacant property.

General Development

Many of Reading's land use patterns are characterized by dense development, a variety of uses and a limited amount of vacant land suitable for new construction. In the early years, all development in the City was concentrated in its central core. The rapid expansion of the urbanized area was stimulated by industrial growth accompanied by the workers' needs for modest housing nearby. These residential neighborhoods, in turn, attracted support businesses and services to meet the needs of the residents.

ISSUE: The current pattern of mixed-use development contributes to the City's overall vitality and convenience.

POLICIES:

1.1. Refine or modify land use controls to minimize any adverse impact of non-conforming uses.

1.2. Develop better performance standards for incompatible uses in order to expand opportunities for reuse of marginal properties.

1.3. Develop or reinforce land use patterns that provide positive activity during the daytime and evening.

1.4. Market vacant buildings and underutilized properties for reuse that is consistent with neighborhood character (see Chapter on Economic Development).

Residential

Approximately 42% of Reading's developed land area is comprised of residential land uses. Rowhomes account for more than 70% of the total number of structures in the City. Residential areas exhibit a variety of quality, density and land use diversity usually related to their historical period of development. Residential neighborhoods located near the downtown and along major traffic arteries are generally higher density and more interspersed with non-residential uses. Higher density neighborhoods are also evident in older sections of the City where early industrial development stimulated the construction of workers' housing, usually on smaller scale lots. Densely developed residential neighborhoods are usually deficient in on-street and off-street parking opportunities. Newer residential areas toward the periphery of Reading have lower den-

sities and fewer non-residential uses. These neighborhoods are more singular in character because of zoning regulations and less need for mixed use due to greater mobility of the residents. Between 1978 and 1998, almost 50 acres of additional residential land use was developed. The 24 acre increase in one-family residential resulted primarily from the development of vacant lots in Riverdale and the 18th Ward in addition to major projects such as East Bank (Sixth Ward), Castlewood, Summit Village (Morgantown Road) and Bingaman Court. New one family condominiums were constructed at Mountain View (North Fourteenth Street) and converted at Penn Hill (Hill Road). Multi-family residential use increased by 25 acres during this 20-year interval. New apartment projects included the Reading Elderly high-rise (Front and Washington Streets), River Oak, Wood Street apartments, Constitution Terrace (South Fourth Street), Market Square residential campus (700 block of Penn Street) and Penn's Commons Court (Eleventh and Penn Streets). Through adaptive reuse, several older, non-residential structures were converted into new apartment buildings: the Bakery (120 South Third Street), the Bindery (150 North Fourth Street), the Bingham Apartments (456 Bingaman Street), the Cotton Street School (1018 Cotton Street), Elmview Apartments (350 Elm Street), Grammary Court (211 West Douglass Street), Hampden Firehouse (1101 Greenwich Street), Northmont School (711 Bruckman Avenue), Riverloft (550 Pearl Street), the Silk Mill (1200 North Eleventh Street) and the Wyomissing Club (501 Walnut Street).

There are limited opportunities for new residential development in the City since the amount of undeveloped land has decreased by more than 43% since 1978 to 232 acres, much of which is difficult to develop or is zoned for non-residential use. There are more than 26 acres of land presently available in Castlewood for the development of single family homes. Two significant tracts of undeveloped land are situated in the 18th Ward, although both are presently zoned manufacturing-commercial. The largest parcel is located on the eastern side of Morgantown Road, to the north of Angelica Creek, and contains approximately 50 acres. However, access is difficult and irregular topography probably restricts development to about half of the site. The other tract, containing about 18 acres, is situated to the east of Summit Chase Drive and it also has steep topography.

Although there is a minimum amount of undeveloped land, there are opportunities for appropriate adaptive reuse and residential infill. The residential use of the upper floors of buildings in commercial areas could increase property value as well as stimulate activity.

ISSUE: Protect and improve the environment in residential neighborhoods.

POLICIES:

2.1. Review land development regulations to adequately buffer existing residential character from incompatible uses.

2.2. Limit the expansion of non-conforming uses, granted through variance or special exception, to protect overall character of residential neighborhoods.

2.3. Increase parking opportunities in more densely developed neighborhoods.

2.4. Develop strategies for reducing density and building coverage in crowded neighborhoods.

2.5. Limit conversion of existing single family dwellings into multifamily structures unless conversion is consistent with character of the neighborhood and adequate off-street parking is provided.

2.6. Explore the opportunities for expanding the existing historic districts and creating additional ones. (see Quality of Life, page 76)

ISSUE: Encourage the establishment of new residential uses and/or neighborhoods at appropriate locations.

POLICIES:

2.7. Encourage new residential infill development that is compatible with the surrounding neighborhood, provides adequate parking and does not dramatically increase density.

2.8. Consider adaptive re-use of non-residential structures, which maintain neighborhood character, have minimal impact on infrastructure and increase economic base.

2.9. Encourage residential re-use of upper floors of buildings in the downtown to increase vitality of City and to augment property values.

2.10. Promote new residential development on vacant land in lower density residential neighborhoods.

Commercial

Commercial land uses occupy over 14% of the developed land area in Reading. The primary concentrations are in the central business district; along the Warren Street Bypass in the northwest; the Hiester's Lane/Rockland Street/Kutztown Road area in the northeast; the outlet area around Oley, Ninth, and Spring Streets; and along Lancaster Avenue and Morgantown Road in the 18th Ward. In addition, there are numerous neighborhood commercial nodes that provide convenience shopping and personal services to small local markets.

DOWNTOWN – Downtown Reading was historically the commercial center of Berks County. Advancements in personal transportation stimulated residential growth in the areas surrounding the City and commercial development followed to the suburbs. Since the 1970's, the downtown has been transformed from the retail and commercial core of the City and region to an office and service industry center. Between 1978 and 1998, retail land use has decreased by nearly 3½ acres in the central business district. Reading's two major department stores, Pomeroy's and Whitner's, both closed as did Stichter Hardware, Farr's Shoestore, and two downtown supermarkets. During the same period, office, service and some public uses have increased by nearly eight acres in the downtown. Several major structures were converted into general office space, such as the Keystone Firehouse, the American House, the original CNA tower and the former Berkshire Hotel. New office buildings were constructed in the downtown including the Gateway Building, CNA regional headquarters, First Union Commons, the Glen Gery Building, the Professional Office building, the County Services Center and the State Office Building. New construction accounts for the three-acre reduction in off-street parking and a 2½-acre decrease in the amount of vacant land. The reconfiguration of Penn Square as a downtown transit hub in 1993 removed the Penn Mall, reducing park area by more than four acres.

In the late 1980's, Meridian Bank relocated its data processing and operations center to Spring Township, leaving a large amount of vacant space in downtown Reading and reducing the work force by more than 800 employees. Some of the abandoned office space is now occupied, but there are former Meridian office buildings in the 400 block of Penn Street and at Sixth and Washington Streets that are available for reuse. The buildings at 424-448 Penn Street, formerly Waco's Furniture store, Whitner's Department Store, J.C. Mumma's jewelry store, and Farr's shoe store are currently vacant and deteriorated. Other long-established downtown retailers have also gone out of business or left since 1978 and some of these storefronts remain vacant or are occupied by marginal uses.

The use of many commercial properties is restricted to the first floor, thereby significantly limiting the return on real estate investment. The occupancy of some or all of the upper floors could increase downtown activity and generate addition property revenue, as well as add to the City's tax base (see Chapter on Business and Workforce Development).

ISSUE: Downtown Reading remains an activity center in the City, but has lost much of its former vibrancy and no longer functions as the center of the region.

POLICIES:

3.1 Develop concepts and strategies for the downtown based on recent development and previously endorsed plans,

3.2 Evaluate the influence of the Sovereign Center to guide potential strategies for nearby underutilized or vacant properties.

3.3 Create innovative programs for attracting new commercial and residential uses that are appropriate to the character of individual activity areas.

3.4 Assist business and property owners in the co-ordination of special events, business hours, property lighting, signage and reinvestment.

3.5 Develop a unified strategy for marketing the downtown.

3.6 Promote first floor activities that are interactive with pedestrians in commercial areas of downtown.

3.7 Encourage residential re-use of upper floors of buildings in the downtown to increase vitality of City and to augment property values.

NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL – Neighborhood-oriented businesses can be found scattered throughout the City. Often, they are concentrated at important intersections or along blocks of major streets. The neighborhood commercial uses were originally located in the first floor storefronts of older rowhomes or end-of-row residential structures. More recently, self-serve gas stations with accompanying convenience stores have been developed at sites with heavier traffic volumes. The impact of these stations on residential areas needs to be minimized.

Concentrations of neighborhood businesses are evident around the intersections of Fifth and Spring Streets, Ninth and Spring Streets, Thirteenth and Buttonwood Streets, and Ninth and Bingaman Streets, as well as along the 600 and 1300 blocks of Schuylkill Avenue.

ISSUE: Neighborhood-oriented shopping areas serve the everyday needs of residents.

POLICIES:

4.1. Support the development of additional retail and service uses that are neighborhood oriented and can be located in existing neighborhood commercial areas.

4.2. Encourage the re-use of existing storefronts and commercial properties.

4.3. Modify performance standards to improve on-site traffic flow, parking, signage and appropriate landscaping.

4.4. Limit the development of gas station / convenience stores to major traffic routes.

HIGHWAY COMMERCIAL – Although highway commercial use accounts for only 1.5% of the developed land area in Reading, there has been a 40% increase in acreage since 1978. Established areas along the Warren Street Bypass in Glenside and Lancaster Avenue in the 18th Ward have not experienced much additional growth since 1978. New highway commercial uses are most evident along Hiester's Lane, Rockland Street and Kutztown Road in the northeast, along North Fifth Street, between Amity and Bern Streets, and along the Morgantown Road. Most areas available for highway commercial have now been developed.

ISSUE: Highway commercial uses present special challenges in urban areas relative to traffic flow, pedestrian and vehicular safety, and visual quality.

POLICIES:

5.1. Limit number of driveway curb cuts to reduce interruptions to traffic flow and minimize hazards.

5.2. Encourage the creation of common driveways and parking areas when possible.

5.3. Reduce visual clutter by modifying zoning regulations regarding size, number and content of business signs.

5.4. Establish stronger regulations for appropriate landscaping and screening.

RETAIL OUTLETS – The retail outlet business in the City has experienced significant changes since 1978 (see Business & Workforce Development, Chapter 6). At that time, there were three separate major enterprises, all in the northeast part of Reading: the Great Factory Store, 1100 block of Moss Street; the Reading Outlet Center, 800 block of North Ninth Street; and, the Big Mill Outlet, 700 block of North Eighth Street. All three operations were characterized by old, multi-storied factory buildings located in densely developed residential neighborhoods. The original industrial buildings were renovated to house a concentration of varied retail outlets.

The Great Factory Store closed in the mid-1980's and the western half of the complex was destroyed by fire in 1996. The Reading Outlet Center has expanded to include the former Big Mill Outlet, as well as several former industrial buildings in the 800 block of Oley Street.

The Reading Station outlet center opened in 1991 on the eastern side of North Sixth Street between Douglass and Spring Streets. The upscale retail outlet complex featured the redevelopment of more than 20 acres of former Reading Railroad land, including the renovation of the three story Reading Company "storehouse", construction of new retail space and parking for more than 800 cars. By 1994, Reading Station had nearly 40 stores and 85% occupancy. However, the facility nearly closed in 1995 and by the end of 1998, there were only 7 stores remaining.

ISSUE: The retail outlets are an important part of the City's identity as well as one of the most important tourist attractions. Since they are located in areas of high-density residential development, there is a need to protect the quality of life in the nearby residential areas even as the City seeks to promote the success of the outlets.

POLICIES:

6.1 Support mixed use development at Reading Station retail outlet center.

6.2 Examine the present boundaries and regulations of the Residential Outlet Zoning District to redefine the area in which retail outlets may locate or expand.

6.3 Improve traffic circulation through the outlet neighborhoods.

6.4 Encourage additional parking opportunities for customers of the Reading Outlet Center.

6.5 Promote pedestrian safety.

Industrial

Industrial land uses presently account for more than 12% of the developed land area in the City. Most concentrations are found near the Schuylkill River or within close proximity to existing or former railroad rights-of-way. Since 1978, there has been only a slight net increase in heavy industrial acreage. Two of the City's largest industries, Carpenter Technology and Dana Corporation, account for almost half of the 395 acre total.

During the past 20 years, light industrial uses have increased by more than 21% to 107 acres. Most of this change is a direct result of new development in the Northeast Industrial renewal area, south of Hiester's Lane and west of Kutztown Road.

The amount of undeveloped land currently available for new industrial use is minimal. As stated earlier in the residential section, there are 50 acres along Morgantown Road and 18 acres east of Summit Chase Drive that are presently vacant. However, both of these sites have difficult access and irregular terrain, making industrial use especially difficult.

The redevelopment of former industrial or railroad properties in the City does provide some opportunities for new industrial investment. The creation of the Keystone Opportunity Zone (KOZ) should provide additional incentive for reinvestment in underutilized properties (see Chapter on Business and Workforce Development). Possible sites could include the former scrapyard at Eleventh and Rockland Streets, the former American Chain and Cable property, the Reading Grey Iron property and the former site of the Outer Station along North Sixth Street. Scaled

down operations of the Norfolk Southern railroad or the Dana Corporation could provide additional land for industrial development.

ISSUE: Support existing industrial and manufacturing uses in the City.

POLICIES:

7.1. Explore improvements to supporting transportation system and traffic patterns.

7.2. Encourage industrial expansion with the satisfactory mitigation of environmental and neighborhood impact.

ISSUE: There is little vacant land available for new industrial development. Industrial growth will require the development of difficult sites and for the rehabilitation of existing industrial buildings.

POLICIES:

7.3. Promote industrial growth in the City through the construction of new facilities and the rehabilitation of existing buildings in areas where adverse impacts can be minimized.

7.4. Market vacant parcels and structures for appropriate industrial rehabilitation.

7.5. Support new industrial development in areas with good access to municipal services and the regional highway system.

7.6. Improve local transportation system for access to new industrial development.

7.7. Encourage the reuse of former industrial buildings to augment the City's tax base and to utilize the neighborhood workforce.

Public and Institutional Uses

Public and institutional uses occupy more than 13% of Reading's developed land area. Facilities such as schools, fire stations, libraries and churches are found throughout the City, while government uses are generally concentrated in the central business district. Other major public institutions include a hospital and three colleges: St. Joseph Medical Center is located at Twelfth and Walnut Streets with a downtown clinic at Sixth and Walnut Streets; Albright, Alvernia, and the Reading Area Community College (RACC) are all situated near the edges of the City.

Since 1978, public and institutional land use in Reading has increased by 17 acres. Additional development at RACC, on the western side of Front Street, and at Albright College, to the north of Rockland Street, account for much of the net growth. The expansion of City Hall, the construction of the State Office Building and the County Services Building, and the purchase of land for the Civic Center have also added to the new total.

Several public and institutional facilities provide significant employment opportunities and community services as well as generate positive activity. The larger institutions appear to have suffi-

cient area for projected growth. Increased traffic and parking demands can have an adverse impact on adjacent neighborhoods.

ISSUE: The major institutions in the City are centers of activity, service, and employment, attracting people from throughout the County and beyond, reinforcing the City's role as the center of the region.

POLICIES:

8.1. Strengthen the downtown as the regional center for government and law.

8.2. Encourage the progressive growth of the City's major institutions within the scope of their objectives and current boundaries.

ISSUE: Public and institutional uses sometimes have adverse impacts upon surrounding residential neighborhoods.

POLICIES:

8.3. Protect adjacent residential neighborhoods from adverse impacts due to the scale of structures or their use, traffic, and parking demand.

8.4. Encourage dialogue between public/institutional uses and the residents of adjacent neighborhoods.

Open Space and Recreation

The City benefits from more than 1,100 acres of open space and outdoor recreational facilities. Parks and playgrounds account for the 470 acres of land presently devoted to passive and active recreational use. The current distribution of outdoor facilities does not ensure that all neighborhoods are adequately served, but the update of the City's Comprehensive Park and Open Space Plan should address outstanding deficiencies (see Community Facilities & Services Chapter).

Since 1978, the expansion of the City's bikeway system along the Schuylkill River and Tulpehocken Creek has added some 58 acres to the parks system. There are still some segments of the bikeway that are not yet complete, and maintenance of the existing sections is generally lacking.

The public acquisition of more land on Neversink Mountain during the past 20 years has added another 27 acres of woodland for a total of 365 acres of Mt. Penn and Neversink Mountain reserves available for hiking and enjoyment of the natural environment. Much of Neversink Mountain is still in private ownership.

The waterways of the Schuylkill River and Tulpehocken Creek occupy more than 140 acres of open space. Most of the riverbanks and stream banks lie in the 100 year flood plain and development should be discouraged.

Long-established cemeteries such as Charles Evans provide over 160 acres of landscaped oases in a densely developed City, encouraging walking and quiet contemplation.

ISSUE: The City's parks, recreational facilities and open green spaces are a valuable asset, providing much-needed relief from dense patterns of development found in most neighborhoods.

POLICIES:

9.1. Support the development of new recreation facilities, the expansion of existing ones, and improved maintenance programs in accordance with the recommendations of the City's Comprehensive Park and Open Space Plan.

9.2. Encourage efforts to maintain and preserve natural environment of the Mt. Penn and Neversink Mountain reserves.

9.3. Complete the City's riverfront bikeway system, including connections to regional greenway systems.

9.4. Restrict development along the banks of Reading's waterways to protect the natural environment, sensitive ecological and flood-prone areas.

Note: Additional recreation and open space policies can be found in Chapter 4.

Vacant Land and New Development Opportunities

As stated earlier in this chapter, the City of Reading is almost entirely built out. Opportunities for any kind of new development are severely limited. The 1998 land use survey estimates that the City still has 232 acres of undeveloped land. However, this number is misleading since it includes areas of steep topography, difficult access and portions of the flood plain. The larger tracts of vacant land in Reading that can support some degree of new development are listed on Table 3 and identified on Map 2.

There are also opportunities for the reuse of former industrial sites in the Buttonwood Gateway Urban Renewal Area, the Northeast Industrial Area and the central railroad yards. These sites are also identified on Map 2 and listed on Table 3. The redevelopment of these tracts may require the removal of dilapidated structures and/or the remediation of certain environmental issues. The availability of Brownfields funding and the creation of the Keystone Opportunities Zone can make some sites more viable for appropriate reuse.

New development of vacant land or previously improved tracts should address the City's economic and tax base, housing objectives, new job creation and activity generation. Opportunities for alternative reuse should be considered, as well.

ISSUE: There is very little vacant land remaining in the City that is suitable for any kind of development.

POLICIES

10.1 Evaluate alternative uses for vacant or underutilized tracts of land in the City.

10.2 Encourage the appropriate development of vacant land or reuse of former industrial sites to address the City's economic, housing, employment and neighborhood objectives.

10.3 Maintain inventory of larger sites available for development or reinvestment.

10.4 Market opportunities for additional development.

10.5 Utilize State and Federal programs to mitigate adverse environmental issues and to provide supportive infrastructure.

TABLE 3

VACANT LAND AND REUSE OPPORTUNITIES

PARCEL	LOCATION	APPROX. SIZE (ACRES)	ZONING DISTRICT
1	645 Hiester's Lane	5.2	M-C
2	620 Hiester's Lane	4.0	M-C
3	1042 Rockland Street	7.2	M-C
4	1400 Butler Street	3.5	R-3
5	1130 Moss Street	0.8	R-3
6	451 North Sixth Street (Outer Station)	10.1	M-C
7	467 Tulpehocken Street	1.6	M-C
8	404 - 441 Huyett Street	1.4	M-C
9	River Road / Buttonwood Street	1.1	M-C
10	Second and Washington Streets	0.8	C-C
11	700 Block Penn Street	2.8	C-C
12	300 Block Riverfront Drive	0.8	M-C
13	401 Canal Street (MC 25B)	1.3	M-C
14	620 Canal Street (MC 32)	1.8	M-C
15	Castlewood (Various Sites)	26.0	R-1A
16	650 Old Wyomissing Road	18.0	M-C
17	625 Morgantown Road	50.0	M-C
A	601 Hiester's Lane	2.8	M-C
B	1728 North 12th Street (Armory)	1.2	M-C
C	630 / 641 McKnight Street	1.4	R-3
D	500 Tulpehocken Street (Gray Iron)	4.0	M-C
E	366 Tulpehocken Street	11.8	M-C
F	424-446 Penn Street	0.9	C-C
G	100 - 46 South Seventh Street	1.0	M-C
H	620 - 700 Morgantown Road	4.1	M-C

Map 2

Chapter Three
Transportation

INTRODUCTION

An effective urban transportation system should provide access within the immediate area, between that area and other parts of the region and the country, as well as preserve and enhance economic activity, relieve congestion, and promote energy conservation. Essential to the development and maintenance of a convenient and efficient transportation network is consideration of not only the street and highway network, but other modes of transportation including public transportation, railroads and airports. Safe, affordable and convenient parking facilities must be available in residential neighborhoods as well as downtown commercial areas. Reading's transportation strategy is directed toward providing the motorist, pedestrian and transit user with safe, convenient and effective transportation facilities.

BACKGROUND

Transportation has always been an integral part of Reading. Geography and history combined to shape the regional and local aspects of transportation in the Reading area.

Founded in 1748 at a ford in the Schuylkill River for the Tulpehocken Road between Harrisburg and Philadelphia, where the Penn Street Bridge is now located, Reading's development has been, from the earliest times, based on the movement of goods and people. Within 100 years of its founding, Reading was connected to the region and beyond through a transportation network consisting of roads, canals and railroads. The canals eventually became obsolete with the increasing efficiency of railroads. By the turn of the 20th Century, numerous freight and passenger railroads served the City and trolley cars provided mass transit to city and suburban residents. As automobiles and trucks replaced the railroads as the primary mode of transporting people and goods, and activity nodes moved away from the central city, the importance of the regional highway network increased.

TRANSPORTATION ISSUES AND POLICIES

The internal street network, totaling approximately 138 miles of paved streets, is predominantly laid out in a compass point grid pattern in the oldest parts of the City. Except for Penn Street, many streets in the downtown are one-way only. The grid pattern has permitted maximum development in the limited area of the City, but precludes major changes to the existing circulation system. The City's dense development makes improvements other than necessary roadway and bridge repairs and maintenance difficult as well as putting pressure on residential and downtown parking. Enhanced signage, traffic signal synchronization, street paving and street cleaning programs, and ordinances protecting the streetscape would improve the City's quality of life and perception. However, even with the limitations of narrow streets and steep slopes, the street system has experienced some significant changes during the last quarter of the 20th Century.

Many changes have occurred to the street/traffic circulation system in the Reading metropolitan area in the past 25 years. Streets in the City were opened, closed, widened and created to improve and sometimes restrict the movement of traffic. The expanded regional highway network has improved access to more areas of the County and beyond.

Local Street Network

The most visible and certainly one of the most significant and controversial changes to the street network was made to Penn Square. Designed by Thomas Penn in 1748, Penn Square had been the commercial center of Reading and Berks County prior to the rise of suburban shopping and office complexes. For the past 125 years, it has also been the main transit area for horse cars, trolleys and now buses. In the early 1970's, Penn Square was redesigned and underwent its first major renovation in the 20th Century. The traffic circle at the 5th & Penn intersection was removed and the 500 block of Penn Street was closed to all but service vehicles. The cartway in the 400 block was narrowed and the sidewalks widened. A pedestrian mall, complete with trees, shrubs, plazas and fountains, was created as the entrance to a downtown enclosed mall proposed for Penn Street between 6th and 8th Streets.

In 1990, a committee created by the Mayor to study the design of Penn Square recommended reopening the 500 block of Penn Street to vehicular traffic. However, public funds were not available to complete the committee's proposal. The Berks Area Reading Transportation Authority (BARTA) became involved and developed a new plan for reopening the street to include a downtown bus transfer area, which would have 8 bus berths, making Penn Square the transit hub of the BARTA system. When the 500 block of Penn Street was reopened to through traffic and on-street parking in 1993, the commercial character to the Square returned while the pedestrian friendly atmosphere created by landscaping, lighting and paving was retained.

Beginning in the early 1970's, the street network in the Model Cities One, Riverfront, Schuylkill, Near Northwest and Northeast Industrial Urban Renewal Areas was modified to improve traffic circulation, separate neighborhood and commercial traffic, and create larger parcels for new development. Improvements included reconfiguring or realigning inadequate and vacating unnecessary streets, connecting some dead end streets, and creating a few new streets. New Canal Street, Riverfront Drive, William Lane, the Industrial Collector and Lafayette Street are some of the new or improved roadways serving area businesses and residents. New streets were also created in the East Bank and other residential developments.

STREETSCAPE - The City's network of paved streets and paved and unpaved alleys does not always conform adequately to the topography in many areas of the city. Streets vary in size (cartway and right-of-way width) and type (arterial, collector, minor, etc.) and are maintained by the City only if they are a part of the City's Topographic Survey. The majority of alleys are not on the Topographic Survey; therefore, maintenance is the responsibility of abutting property owners. Scheduled maintenance of State highways located in the City is determined by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) and the City is reimbursed for the cost of repairs. The City's street paving program has suffered because funds are diverted for other Public Works purposes. Between 1990 and 1999, less than 16 miles of streets were paved. In 1990, 5.64 miles were paved, while in 1999, only .614 miles were paved. Most paving is overlay; reconstruction is usually in response to emergencies such as water main breaks.

In addition to street maintenance, sidewalks and street lighting are important aspects of the streetscape as well as pedestrian safety. Maintenance and repair of sidewalks are the responsibility of property owners. Obstructions placed on sidewalks, which are typically part of the public

right-of-way, is an issue in many City neighborhoods. Public telephones, newspaper honor boxes, and soft drink machines are a nuisance and an eyesore, especially in historic districts.

When the 200, 300, 900 and 1000 blocks of Penn Street underwent extensive public improvements in 1990, standard details were established for paving design, lighting fixtures and street tree species. When Penn Square was reopened in 1993, the paving pattern and style of pedestrian lighting from the aforementioned blocks of Penn Street were used as prototypes. The same improvements have been incorporated into recent and planned downtown development projects.

ISSUE: To create attractive streetscapes that contribute to the convenience, safety and appeal of urban life.

POLICIES:

1.1 Establish comprehensive street cleaning, repaving and line painting programs that would include short-term and long-term goals.

1.2 Enact the sidewalk obstruction ordinance that would enhance the streetscape and improve safety.

1.3 Develop a comprehensive sidewalk maintenance program that would address the handicap ramp installation program, snow removal, and street trees.

Pedestrian Safety

Part of the convenience and appeal of an urban environment is the ability to walk to nearby destinations. This is especially true downtown and in the Outlet District where large numbers of pedestrians travel between parking areas and offices and stores. Enhancements to the streetscape (see above) would increase the level of safety and comfort for pedestrians throughout the City.

Street lighting is vital to actual and perceived pedestrian safety throughout the City. Sidewalks that are well illuminated not only convey a sense of safety in areas with activity in the evening, but have been shown to deter crime. Properly functioning streetlights also reduce the potential for pedestrian and vehicle conflicts.

ISSUE: To enhance the general welfare and safety of pedestrians through physical improvements and new programs that preserve the character of neighborhoods.

POLICIES:

2.1 Assess pedestrian street lighting needs citywide that would improve the sense of security.

2.2 Evaluate circulation patterns in areas of heavy pedestrian traffic to improve safety and convenience throughout the day.

2.3 Explore options for improving pedestrian safety at the Lancaster Avenue/Morgantown Road/West Shore Bypass intersection.

Circulation

When the 500 block of Penn Square was closed to through traffic, Franklin Street became the main eastbound artery and Washington Street the main westbound artery through downtown. Traffic to downtown parking garages as well as the Outlet shopping areas is still directed onto streets paralleling Penn. Downtown businesses would benefit by the redistribution of some through traffic back onto Penn Street. Effective and attractive signage is necessary to direct visitors to shopping, entertainment, lodging and offices downtown and in other activity centers.

In 1998, the Buttonwood Gateway Renewal Area was declared blighted and a redevelopment proposal was developed. Providing access to this area while keeping truck traffic from the adjacent residential neighborhoods needs to be addressed. The City's Keystone Opportunity Zone (see Business and Workforce Development) will also require transportation improvements.

In the mid-1970's, Rockland Street was improved between 11th Street and 13th Street completing the east-west connection in the northwest part of the City. Traffic patterns in this area were further enhanced when one of the two narrow railroad overpasses on Hiester's Lane was removed. The lack of left turn lanes for east and west bound traffic in the densely developed commercial area around 11th & Rockland Streets exacerbates congestion and will only increase when undeveloped properties in the area are improved.

ISSUE: To improve traffic flow and safety through infrastructure enhancements that reduce congestion, improve air quality and will increase the City's appeal as a place to live, work and visit.

POLICIES:

3.1 Standardize street, directional and attraction signage with assistance from Berks County and the State.

3.2 Synchronize signals to improve traffic flow downtown and on major arterial streets.

ISSUE: Reduce the conflict by truck traffic in residential neighborhoods.

POLICIES:

4.1 Develop options for providing access to industrial areas that limits truck traffic on residential streets.

4.2 Evaluate congestion reducing improvements to the 11th & Rockland Streets intersection.

Regional Highway Network

Reading's future is closely linked to its accessibility to other areas of the region as well as the rest of the State. As trucks have replaced the railroad as the primary mode of transporting unfinished materials and manufactured products, the importance of the regional highway system has increased. Two major highways, Routes 222 and 422, intersect in Reading and two others terminate in the City, Routes 61 and 183 (Map 1). A spur of the Interstate Highway system,

Map 1

Interstate 176, connects Reading with the Pennsylvania Turnpike to the south. The economic viability of Reading in the region is very much dependent on the completion of this network.

Access to the northeast area of the City was improved when the Warren Street Bypass, Route 222, was extended from its eastern terminus at N. 5th Street to Pricetown Road with interchanges at 11th Street and Pricetown Road. Following completion of the Park Road Corridor in 1999, the section of the Warren Street Bypass east of the interchange with the West Shore Bypass was redesignated as Route 12.

The Park Road Corridor (U.S. Route 222), a limited access highway connecting the Warren Street and West Shore Bypasses with the Road to Nowhere, was designed to relieve congestion on 5th Street Highway and the Warren Street Bypass by diverting through traffic away from the commercial developments in those areas. Another Rt. 222 south improvement, slated for completion in 2004, will extend the Warren Street Bypass from Wyomissing to the Lancaster County line. The four lane, limited access highway will replace the existing Route 222 south of Shillington and further divert through traffic away from the City. These improvements alone will not eliminate the rush hour congestion at the Bypass interchanges at Lancaster Avenue, Penn Street, Schuylkill Avenue and Route 61(Map 2).

In the late 1960's, a proposal was made to build a bridge connecting the West Shore Bypass and downtown Reading in the vicinity of South Ninth Street. The South Reading Bridge concept may have been important at a time when Reading was the commercial hub of Berks County. However, commercial development during the past 25 years has increasingly moved to suburban areas of the County. Although congestion on Lancaster Avenue continues to cause problems during the morning and evening rush hours, it does not justify the construction of an additional bridge.

ISSUE: Providing and maintaining a convenient highway network between Reading and other parts of Berks County, the region and the country will contribute to the economic well-being of the area. Access to and from the Warren Street/West Shore Bypass does not efficiently and effectively serve City residents, employees and visitors.

POLICIES:

5.1 Support Reading Area Transportation Study (RATS) evaluations for reducing congestion at heavily traveled Bypass interchanges.

5.2 Evaluate the impact that the completed regional highway system has on the local street network.

5.3 Coordinate transportation and land use planning for proposed large-scale commercial, industrial and residential developments.

Map 2

Bikeway System

The City's bikeway system is a paved, handicap accessible trail used for walking and biking, which parallels the Schuylkill River and Tulpehocken Creek. The bikeway is part of a trail system in the Schuylkill River Heritage Corridor (See Quality of Life Chapter) that extends from Philadelphia to the river's headwaters in Schuylkill County. Extending from Heritage Park near South Sixth and Canal Streets to Stonecliffe Park in the Glenside area, the bikeway connects Riverfront Park, the RACC campus, Barbey's Playground, Dana Memorial Park and Baer Park. There is also a connection to the Third & Spruce Recreation Center in the southwest section of the City. Small sections of the bikeway are missing and linkages to the Thun Trail on the west shore of the Schuylkill River and trails in neighboring municipalities have not been completed. In the City's Glenside neighborhood the pedestrians and cyclists utilize Blair Avenue for approximately one half mile from the Schuylkill Avenue Bridge to where the paved trail begins again.

ISSUE: The expansion and improvement of the bikeway system is an important alternative transportation resource for all area residents and visitors that should be maintained through joint public and private efforts.

POLICIES:

6.1 Promote future connection of City's Bikeway system with trails in Cumru, Exeter and Muhlenberg Townships as a part of the Schuylkill River Trail System.

6.2 Secure perpetual pedestrian right-of-way access through Carpenter property between North Front Street in Riverside and River Road in Riverdale.

6.3 Develop the most effective trail maintenance programs that benefit users most effectively.

6.4 Establish bicycle lanes on appropriate City streets.

Parking Facilities

Since 1953, the Reading Parking Authority (RPA) has been providing convenient and affordable parking in downtown Reading. The RPA currently operates 7 parking garages and 7 parking lots in downtown Reading, providing a total of 5,401 spaces (Map 3). Nearly 4000 monthly parking permits are issued by the RPA, and some facilities are reserved for permit parking only. Two centrally located parking lots with meters are designated for short-term parking only. The "Pay & Display" lot at 7th & Penn Streets provides machine issued tickets for up to 3 hours of parking.

Since 1998, the RPA has been responsible for enforcement of on-street parking regulations, including the monitoring of the City's 936 parking meters.

Also managed by the RPA, the Residential Parking Permit program provides parking relief for neighborhoods that experience problems due to transient parking. Vehicles without permits are allowed to park for one hour on specified blocks in neighborhoods that have a single large institution such as Saint Joseph Medical Center, Albright College and Alvernia Colleges, as well as on non-metered and metered blocks downtown with a mix of residential and commercial uses. Permit holders residing on blocks with parking meters are not required to activate those meters.

MAP 3 ON THIS PAGE

The development of underutilized parcels of land downtown will most likely create additional off-street parking demand. The surface lot on the northern side of the 700 block of Penn Street, across from the Sovereign Center, presently provides 429 spaces. Its eventual redevelopment will not only eliminate a significant number of spaces from the overall parking inventory, but will also create new parking demand. A new parking structure will ultimately be needed in this block supplement current and new parking requirements in the area.

Four dilapidated storefronts on the south side of the 400 block of Penn Street are slated for demolition in the future. Redevelopment plans for these properties should include off-street parking provisions for any new demand.

Off-street parking, which is not managed by the RPA, is available for public and private use throughout the City providing accessory parking lots and garages for residents, employees, customers, students and/or patients. However, on-street and off-street parking is insufficient in many residential neighborhoods. The narrow frontage of single and multiple family dwellings coupled with the significant number of vehicles per household has resulted in a parking problem in many neighborhoods. Innovative ideas for providing off-street parking utilizing available space are necessary to reduce these pressures.

ISSUE: In order to enhance the vitality of many commercial and residential areas of the City, and to make the City a more attractive place to live, work and recreate, convenient off-street parking facilities and effective on-street parking programs need to be developed that balance the needs of residents, workers, businesses, shoppers and visitors.

POLICIES:

7.1 Evaluate current and future downtown parking needs.

7.2 Require parking facilities as part of any redevelopment plans for the 400 & 700 blocks of Penn Street

7.3 Develop neighborhood parking strategies that are tailored to a specific area or neighborhood.

Public Transportation

Public transportation in the greater Reading area is provided by the Berks Area Reading Transportation Authority (BARTA), two taxicab companies, two inter-city bus carriers and one passenger airline.

With a fleet of nearly 100 vehicles, BARTA transported almost 3 million passengers in 1999. Most of BARTA's 31 daily fixed routes, the Nightline, four Park 'N' Ride routes and all the specialized routes pass through downtown Reading as they cover the major shopping and employment districts in the area. BARTA powers 13% of its fleet by clean natural gas, helping to alleviate air pollution, which is particularly bad in Berks County as well as many other areas of the Northeast.

Special express routes serving Berks Heim, Berco and Threshold cover most of Berks County. BARTA's Special Services Division provides door-to-door transportation for eligible individuals unable to utilize the fixed route services and individuals who receive medical assistance through the ACCESS Program are eligible for free transportation to medical appointments. Convenient

and affordable public transportation is essential to the elderly and low income population in Berks County, many of whom are concentrated in the City.

The BARTA Intermodal Transportation Facility (ITF), located at 7th & Cherry Streets next to the Sovereign Center, will be completed in 2001. The main bus transfer area currently located in Penn Square will be relocated to this site. Provisions for taxis and other passenger drop off areas as well as a rail platform when passenger rail service is returned to Reading have been incorporated into the design. With the inclusion of inter-city buses, all modes of surface mass transit will be concentrated at one downtown location.

Two taxicab and several limousine companies also provide personal transportation service within and outside the Reading region. Two inter-City bus companies serve the downtown Reading Inter-City Bus Terminal providing daily service to Philadelphia, Harrisburg, Pottsville and New York City. Connecting service to all points is available from those cities. The Reading Regional Airport is served by US Airways Express, with daily service to Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and Boston. Charter Services is also available.

ISSUE: Providing convenient, affordable and efficient public transportation services to area residents and visitors is essential to the vitality of Reading and the region.

POLICIES:

8.1 Encourage improvements to the BARTA fleet in order to enhance air quality in Berks County.

8.2 Promote the expansion and retention of essential BARTA services in order to continue meeting the transportation needs of the lower income and elderly residents of the City.

8.3 Support the relocation of the Inter-City bus terminal to the BARTA ITF.

Bridges

There are 17 roadway bridges located in the City that span the Schuylkill River, various railroad lines, and in the case of the Lindbergh Viaduct, a small stream valley. Some of the 12 railroad bridges that cross City streets are single span stone arch, which create a narrow, low underpass. The Court, Washington and Walnut Street bridges over the Mainline railroad tracks (Seventh Street) have all been replaced since the 1970's. A number of other bridges are either slated for repair (Lindbergh Viaduct) or are in need of repair (Schuylkill Avenue over the Beltline).

ISSUE: In order to provide for the safety and convenience of pedestrians and other travelers, regular bridge maintenance in the City is important.

POLICY:

9.1 Identify maintenance responsibility (City, County, State, Railroad) for bridges.

Railroads

In 1839, the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad completed its line between those two cities. The Reading Railroad would continue to grow and eventually became the largest corporation in the world. The importance of railroads has been decreasing for more than 50 years as have the importance of the rail lines and yards in Reading. In 1976, the Federal Government formed Conrail by consolidating the Reading Company, Penn Central and other struggling or bankrupt railroads in the Northeast.

Conrail abandoned a number of lines in and around Reading throughout the 1970's and 1980's. The Schuylkill River Greenway Association has acquired a section of the Schuylkill Valley Branch in the 18th Ward while other sections near Carpenter and Reading Municipal Stadium and along the riverfront have been abandoned and reclaimed by adjacent property owners. The Wilmington and Northern Branch line has been completely abandoned in the City. Although Conrail had abandoned unnecessary rail lines and disposed of property to private businesses, some railroad land in the north central part of the City remains underutilized (See Land Use Chapter).

In 1999, Norfolk Southern acquired Conrail yards and lines in the Reading and Berks County area. The Beltline (west shore of the Schuylkill River), the Mainline running through downtown and the Lebanon Valley Branch (parallel to Green Street) remain active. Railroad sidings serving Dana Corporation and Carpenter and the northeast industrial area are used occasionally.

There are 10 grade railroad crossings in the City. Four major east-west thoroughfares cross the Mainline downtown and North Third Street crosses the Lebanon Valley Branch. All the major grade crossings have gates and warning signals. The remaining crossings are on little used sidings in industrial areas in the northern section of the City.

At one time 3 passenger railroad stations were located in the City. When passenger service was discontinued in 1981, only the Franklin Street Station was in operation. The old Outer Station burned the year before and the Penn Central Station at the foot of Penn Street had long been razed. The Schuylkill Valley Metro is a proposed BARTA/Southeast Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) collaboration to return passenger rail service to Berks. The 62-mile line would run from center city Philadelphia terminating at the VF Complex in Wyomissing. Proposed Berks County stations would be in Douglassville, Exeter Township, the BARTA ITF and the site of the former Outer Station on North 6th Street.

ISSUE: The railroad's prominence in Reading has declined dramatically but continues to impact the City as a resource for both industrial development and an alternative means of transportation.

POLICIES:

10.1 Promote the best reuse of abandoned railroad rights-of-way and underutilized railroad property.

10.2 Support the Schuylkill Valley Metro if it is determined to be feasible and necessary.

Chapter Four
Community Facilities & Services

INTRODUCTION

Overall, the City is well served by public and quasi-public facilities and services. In order for the City to provide effective municipal services to its citizens, City Hall, the City Garage, libraries, firehouses, the Wastewater Treatment Plant, and storm sewer system should be consistently maintained, repaired and upgraded. The Management Information System should keep pace with the changes in computer and information technology. The City's parks and playgrounds should be maintained to provide access and opportunity for all. The Police Department should be staffed at sufficient levels to meet public safety needs. Public schools and other educational facilities should be supported in their endeavor to educate the City's young people and provide training and instructional opportunities for all area residents and businesses.

The Community Facilities goals are directed toward the existing and future needs of the City brought about by the changing character of the region, demographics, facility maintenance and upgrade, and opportunities for regionalization of selected services.

GENERAL GOVERNMENT FACILITIES

The various levels of government are centrally located in Reading. Concentrated downtown are offices of the United States Government, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the County of Berks, in addition to the municipal government offices.

Most Berks County government offices in downtown Reading were consolidated in the Berks County Courthouse and Services Center in 1990. Other County facilities, such as Parks Administration, the Berks Heim, Berks County Prison and the Agricultural Center are located outside the City limits.

Built in 1980, the Pennsylvania State Office Building at 7th & Cherry Streets houses the Department of Welfare, Labor & Industry and the Department of Revenue. In 1999, the State Job Center was consolidated with the County's Employment and Training Office at a location in the northern part of the City in order to provide Berks County residents with one stop employment and training services. The regional Pennsylvania State Police barracks is located in the City.

The Federal Government leases space for the Social Security Administration and Internal Revenue Service offices in the City. The U.S. Bankruptcy Court, a Postal Service annex and a Department of Defense Armed Forces Recruiting Station are located downtown. The Naval and Marine Reserve Center is situated in the 18th Ward.

ISSUE: As the County seat, Reading's role as the central location for government offices should be reinforced.

POLICIES:

1.1 Promote and encourage the centralization of government offices in the City.

1.2 Strengthen relationships and dialogues among various levels of government.

MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT FACILITIES

City Hall

In 1928, City Hall moved to its present location, formerly the Boys High School. A major renovation and expansion in 1994 provided a new entrance atrium, upgrades to Council Chambers, additional workspace for many offices as well as centralizing others in one location. Administrative, legislative, legal and police functions are concentrated in City Hall. In all, more than 25 different offices are situated in one convenient location, where residents, property owners, developers and business persons are able to pay taxes, secure building permits, discuss housing problems or obtain business information. City Hall presently houses the offices of the Mayor, Managing Director, City Clerk, and City Council, as well as Council Chambers and meeting and conference rooms. Although the 1994 expansion increased the total area of City Hall by nearly 40%, there remains a lack of storage space as well as limited parking opportunities for City vehicles and the public.

ISSUE: Although City Hall is a modern facility, government requirements change and should be re-evaluated periodically.

POLICIES:

2.1 Review office and storage space allocation on a regular basis.

2.2 Maintain building systems consistently and efficiently.

ISSUE: Provide convenient parking for City Hall employees and visitors, as well as City vehicles.

POLICIES:

2.3 Explore options for parking City vehicles closer to City Hall.

2.4 Increase parking opportunities for visitors.

The Management Information Systems (MIS) Program plans, acquires, installs and supports information-processing systems for all departments of the City of Reading including personal computer systems and software. The MIS Program provides information systems for most City functions including accounting, payroll, tax and fee collection, permits and licenses, as well as Police crime analysis.

In 1999, the City opened an Internet web site that provides statistics and other information on the City. Adding interaction to the web site would permit individuals to apply for permits or otherwise communicate with selected City departments. The Reading Area Water Authority and Police Department have developed Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to assist in daily operations such as locating water mains and crime analysis, respectively. GIS would be beneficial to the Community Development and Public Works departments for many projects as diverse as monitoring development in the flood plain and code enforcement to the maintenance of the storm sewer system and scheduling street cleaning.

ISSUE: Increased productivity, efficiency and communication are possible through the latest information technology.

POLICIES:

2.5 Maintain and update the existing network operating system and hardware.

2.6 Expand web site to include interaction capabilities.

2.7 Explore opportunities to further develop GIS.

Maintenance and Storage Facilities

The Department of Public Works maintains five storage and repair facilities located throughout the City. The Parks Maintenance Building is located at 14th & Walnut Streets and provides office space for parks and public buildings administration. The facility is also used for equipment vehicle and salt storage, as well as small equipment repair.

Located at 4th & Elm Streets, the City Garage is an inefficient building in need of extensive repairs and reports from 1992 and 1998 state that a new facility should either be built or leased. It is used for the servicing and repair of City owned vehicles and equipment. The existing structure needs major roof repairs, provides insufficient lighting and ventilation and is not compatible with the size of the City's fleet or types of vehicles. Recreation supplies and equipment are stored in an adjacent former school building that is in such dilapidated condition that it cannot be reasonably rehabilitated.

Other City facilities include the "Asphalt Plant" on Nicolls Street that is used by the Streets Division and a storage building located at Windsor and Lincoln Streets used for offices, storage and equipment maintenance for the City's sanitary and storm sewers operations. Vehicles are also stored at both these locations.

ISSUE: The high overhead, maintenance costs and the duplication of services resulting from the scattered Public Works Facilities.

POLICIES:

3.1 Examine the potential consolidation of compatible Public Works facilities in a centralized location to reduce overhead costs and increase the efficiency of their independent functions.

3.2 Retain those buildings that can serve as satellite facilities in distant areas of the City.

3.3 Evaluate alternative uses for any vacated Public Works facilities.

The City maintains a fleet of 340 vehicles for Police, Fire, Public Works and Community Development Departments as well as the Reading Area Water Authority (RAWA) use. Most vehicles are owned by the City and maintained at the City Garage. The maintenance of some Public Works vehicles is performed at their respective storage location.

ISSUE: The high the cost of owning and maintaining vehicles.

POLICIES:

3.4 Explore options for cost savings in maintenance and leasing by considering recommendations of the Fleet Review Team.

3.5 Consolidate vehicle storage and maintenance facilities.

Libraries

Founded in 1763, the Reading Public Library (RPL) is the seventh oldest library in the United States. The current Main Library at 5th & Franklin Streets was built in 1913 using a grant from Andrew Carnegie. In addition to the main library there are three branches at West Windsor Street and Schuylkill Avenue, 11th & Pike Streets, and 15th Street & Perkiomen Avenue. In the 1990's, the Main Library underwent renovations that included improvements to the lighting and the Children's Room. An elevator was also installed to provide greater accessibility.

The Reading Public Library has a collection of more than 100,000 books, almost 215,000 volumes in the Online Catalog and more than 225,000 items in the collection. Total circulation in 1999 was nearly 420,000 items. The number of registered Library card holders in all of Berks County is 125,240 and the RPL had more than 320,000 visits in 1999.

As a member of the Berks County Public Library system and the state-designated District Library Center for Berks County, the RPL serves a total population of approximately 350,000. In 1999, the County of Berks agreed in principle to pay personnel costs for the libraries. The City has been funding approximately one half of the Library's operating budget.

ISSUE: Two out of three Library cardholders reside outside the City of Reading. In order to continue providing a quality library system in a comfortable and convenient setting for all Berks County residents, operating and capital costs should be shared equitably.

POLICIES:

4.1 Formalize funding agreement with County of Berks.

4.2 Develop systematic maintenance program.

Recreational Resources

There are 835 acres of land that make up Reading's recreational resources. Parks, playgrounds and other open spaces account for 470 acres while the remaining 365 acres are dedicated for conservation and public use on Mt. Penn and Neversink Mountain. The diversity of municipal (City) and non-municipal (School District, Housing Authority, Berks County) recreational opportunities in the City is extensive, consisting of urban open spaces, parks and recreational facilities, as well as the mountain reserves. Urban open spaces are generally the smallest areas dedicated for public use. Outdoor recreational facilities, which vary greatly in size and service area, tend to be geared towards physical or passive activities or a combination of both. Physical activities can include informal play or organized sports while passive activities require little or no physical exertion. Mt. Penn and Neversink Mountain contain expansive natural areas, much of which is too steep or too fragile for development and which should be preserved for its beauty and habitat.

The levels of activity and the types of equipment at any recreational facility are determined by its size and the age of the service population. Location and service areas should take into account natural and manmade barriers such as the Schuylkill River, the steep slopes of Mt. Penn and Neversink Mountain, major traffic arteries and railroad rights-of-way.

ISSUE: Provide adequate recreational opportunities for all people who live and work in Reading.

POLICIES:

5.1 Provide systematic evaluation of municipal facilities and programs.

5.2 Develop maintenance, safety and staffing guidelines for all facilities.

5.3 Submit all proposed plans for municipal facilities to Planning Commission for review and comment.

5.4 Encourage continued and expanded cooperation in maintaining/operating non-municipal facilities.

The Department of Public Works has started the process to develop an open space, park and recreation plan that will provide a more detailed analysis of the City's recreational resources and deficiencies. The re-established Park and Recreation Committee (PARC) will assist in this process. The PARC will also act as a liaison with existing recreation organizations as well as assist new groups to get started. Therefore, the policies in this section deal with more general recreation issues.

ISSUE: Some recreational facilities are supported by neighborhood or community associations.

POLICIES:

5.5 Support and coordinate ongoing efforts by existing organizations.

5.6 Encourage the formation of new playground associations.

5.7 Submit Park and Recreation Committee recommendations to Planning Commission.

URBAN OPEN SPACES - The City's urban open spaces are predominantly located downtown and consist of courtyards and small parks, which are typically smaller than one-half acre. Some of these areas are simply a green open space, however, most contain at least benches where residents and downtown workers can socialize, have lunch or just sit and relax. Many open spaces, especially the courtyards and plazas in center-city, also contain attractive paving, landscaping, sculptures and pedestrian lighting.

Public open space downtown benefited from the urban renewal efforts beginning in the 1970's. The plazas, courtyards and mid-block pedestrian connections are the result of the increased emphasis on pedestrian circulation and amenities downtown. An added benefit was a reduction in building density following the demolition of deteriorated and blighted buildings. Courtyards I and II in the 600 block of Penn Street, the CNA Plaza in the 400 block and Cedar Street Park between Washington and Court Streets are midblock pedestrian walkways with public art, landscaping, pedestrian lighting and benches. Market Square is a public open space that was rehabilitated with private funds in 1999 and features new landscaping, paving and benches. The plaza at the Madison Building and the pedestrian walkway through the Market Square residential campus are privately developed open spaces for public use.

ISSUE: Public open space downtown has a positive impact on the character of the City's central business district. This open space philosophy should be continued and expanded.

POLICIES:

5.8 Provide open space and mid-block pedestrian connections as integral elements of any major downtown development plans.

5.9 Develop systematic maintenance programs for downtown public open spaces.

5.10 Evaluate security of downtown open spaces.

NEIGHBORHOOD FACILITIES - There are three general types of facilities that serve the City's neighborhoods, ranging from having only play equipment, to those with equipment and courts up to those with equipment, courts and playfields. The larger the facility, the more amenities and therefore the greater the service area. All the facilities, except Centre Park, provide some level of play equipment. All neighborhoods except Riverdale are served by playground facilities; however, some are better served than others.

The smallest units are typically smaller than ½ acre and contain play equipment for young children and possibly a basketball or volleyball court. The 12 acres dedicated to this type of facility represent less than 3 % of the City's total area devoted to recreation. Although less than ½ of the 13 small neighborhood oriented playgrounds are municipally owned, those operated by the City and the Reading Housing Authority are the most accessible. The Police Athletic League playground and some of the Reading School District's playgrounds have restricted access.

Centre Park can be considered a neighborhood recreation facility although, it does not have any play equipment and is reserved for passive activities. On special occasions throughout the year

Centre Park becomes a regional attraction with its flea market and arts and antique fair, as well as a focal point for the neighborhood's Garden and Christmas Tours.

Some neighborhood recreational facilities serve a larger area and exhibit a greater variety of amenities. Sixteen of these facilities, occupying approximately 20 acres, have play equipment and courts including tennis, as well as playfields for baseball and football. However, only 4 fields are actually dedicated to football or soccer and only 3 fields have lights. The facilities with field-houses attract users from greater distance and require nearby parking opportunities. Many of the large playgrounds are on the edge of residential areas and have adequate on-street parking for normal use. However, parking becomes difficult to secure and additional pressure is placed on the surrounding neighborhood when special events are held such as little league games and even "pick up" basketball, soccer and softball. Pendora and Schlegel Parks have off-street parking, but only Schlegel has an adequate supply to meet heavy demand.

ISSUE: Most areas of the City are well served by neighborhood recreational facilities.

POLICIES:

5.11 Provide adequate recreational facilities where required.

5.12 Continue to maintain all facilities and upgrade deficient ones.

ISSUE: Neighborhood recreational facilities with playfields serve a larger segment of the City's population and impact adjacent residential areas.

POLICIES:

5.13 Provide field lighting where needed.

5.14 Evaluate use of fields to determine optimum activities and programs.

5.15 Explore options for additional parking at larger facilities.

COMMUNITY RECREATIONAL CENTERS - Five of the City's neighborhood recreational facilities also serve as community recreation centers, each located in a geographic quadrant, in addition to the 18th Ward. All have a wide range of recreational opportunities typical of the large neighborhood facilities plus fieldhouses. The community centers range in size from 11th & Pike Playground with 6 acres to Schlegel Park with 23. Schlegel Park, in the 18th Ward, is the only municipal recreation facility with a swimming pool. Schlegel and Pendora Parks have true park-like settings complete with pavilions and picnic areas. Baer Park, Pendora Park and Third & Spruce Recreation Center have tennis courts. Third & Spruce Center, Pendora and 11th & Pike offer activities in their fieldhouses in the evenings. Only Third and Spruce has sufficient outside space to play football and baseball simultaneously.

ISSUE: The community recreation centers should be designed and programmed to serve their specific area.

POLICIES:

5.16 Evaluate recreation centers based on service area and population.

5.17 Develop regular maintenance program for recreation centers.

REGIONAL RECREATION RESOURCES - Regional facilities promote more diverse recreational activities than neighborhood facilities and serve a population that can extend beyond the City limits. These City or County facilities occupy nearly 270 acres and provide a wide variety of activities that can range from small playgrounds to water related interests such as fishing and canoeing.

City Park (Penn's Commons) is one of the City's most prominent recreation facilities serving the neighborhood, City and County. The 44 acre park is located at the eastern end of Penn Street and offers a full range of activities including free concerts in the Fireman's Memorial Bandshell and quiet introspection in the Veteran's Memorial Grove and Rose Garden. In addition to a play area, which features a small castle, and basketball and tennis courts, children are able to shoot marbles on three specially designed rings.

Mineral Spring and Egelman Parks occupy 52 contiguous acres on the southeastern side of Mt. Penn, north of Pendora Park. Mineral Spring Park has a Victorian-era setting featuring pavilions and paths along the Rose Valley Creek. Egelman Park provides picnicking opportunities in a wooded setting next to 2 small lakes.

Angelica Park, situated on 117 acres in the southernmost part of the City, is a natural area with a 12-acre lake and large expanses of lawn for picnicking. In addition to fishing, other features include are the 2 lighted baseball fields and tennis courts.

ISSUE: The City's regional recreation areas benefit all Berks County.

POLICIES:

5.18 Develop site specific maintenance programs.

5.19 Market and promote regional facilities.

5.20 Protect and rehabilitate historic and aesthetic structures in parks.

The City's approximately 4 miles of paved bikeway parallels the Schuylkill River and Tulpehocken Creek almost continuously from Heritage Park to Stonecliffe, connecting seven of the City's recreational facilities. This area is also known as the Reading Greenway and includes features and attractions such as pavilions, public art, natural wetlands and the ruins of a canal lock. A section of the Thun Trail, a separate but related hiking and biking trail, maintained by the Schuylkill River Greenway Association, is located on a former railroad right-of-way near Angelica Park. The Thun Trail will eventually run from Riverfront Park to the Montgomery County line. Although Riverdale Park is not part of the bikeway, it is along the Schuylkill River and could be developed with a trail connection between the City and Muhlenberg Township systems. An area on the western shore of the Schuylkill River in the 18th Ward has potential to be developed for hiking and fishing. See Transportation Chapter for more information and policies regarding the bikeway.

Stonecliffe is a Berks County park located along the Tulpehocken Creek in Glenside and serves as the southern terminus of the County's Union Canal Trail. The park features volleyball, tennis and basketball courts as well as a soccer field, fitness equipment, a fishing platform, and play

equipment. The City trail system connects to the 4.2-mile Berks County system at Stonecliffe, eventually extending to Blue Marsh Lake.

NATURAL FEATURES - The City's premier natural features are the Schuylkill River and the mountain reserves on Mt. Penn and Neversink Mountain, which are shared with 10 neighboring municipalities. These areas represent some of the most fragile ecosystems and environmentally sensitive areas in the City. The mountain reserves include approximately 290 acres on Mt. Penn and more than 70 acres on Neversink. The Berks County Conservancy and the Clinton F. Earl Estate Trust have been acquiring additional land on Neversink Mountain.

The Mt. Penn Reserve is a largely undeveloped, forested area that extends beyond the City limits into Alsace and Lower Alsace Townships. The Pagoda on the southwestern edge of Mt. Penn, and Skyline Drive, which traverses the crest of the mountain, offer spectacular views of the City and western Berks County. Activities on Mt. Penn include the annual automobile hillclimb events on Duryea Drive and model aircraft flying at Drenkel Field. The City's Nature Museum is in the City owned Antietam Lake watershed, which occupies 264 acres at the eastern end of Mt. Penn in Lower Alsace Township.

Like Mt. Penn, the upper slopes of Neversink Mountain are largely undeveloped and shared by a number of neighboring municipalities. However, nearly 1/3 of the undeveloped acreage in the City is still in private ownership. The Berks County Conservancy has developed a rudimentary trail system in a protected wildlife area on top of the western peak.

More than 5 miles of the Schuylkill River passes through the City limits. At one time most of the riverbank was occupied manufacturing and transportation related industry, but Carpenter Technology and Dana Corporations are the only ones remaining. Much of the riparian system has been cleaned and preserved as parkland, with a large amount remaining in a natural state. Many areas have been zoned preservation in order to restrict development.

ISSUE: Reading is endowed with natural features that should be protected and made more accessible.

POLICIES:

5.21 Work with adjacent municipalities and non-government organizations to protect natural areas.

5.22 Assist the Berks County Conservancy in acquiring additional land for public use.

5.23 Explore ways to increase public access.

5.24 Protect City's waterways.

5.25 Continue to limit development in flood plain.

MUNICIPAL SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

For more than 250 years the citizens of Reading have been receiving municipal services. Police and fire protection have been provided since the City's beginning and public water and sewer services were available by the end of the 19th century.

Most of the City's streets, water supply, sewerage treatment and stormwater control are adequate at this time. Capital funds and other resources for infrastructure repair and maintenance need to be allocated and increased whenever possible. Streets, sidewalks and other transportation infrastructure are discussed in the Transportation Chapter of this plan. Additional discussion on Solid Waste can be found in the Quality of Life section.

Police Department

Since it was founded in 1748, the City of Reading has always had police protection, with the first uniformed department being established in 1865. Following City Hall renovations in 1994, the space occupied by the Police Department has greatly increased and includes Patrol Roll Call, which was previously located in the Police Academy in City Park.

The Reading Police Department currently consists of 200 male and female officers, and 26 full time civilian employees. The force is five officers below the optimum level. It is anticipated that up to 20 officers will be retiring before 2005.

There are 83 Police vehicles that are owned by the City and vehicle maintenance is performed at the City garage, or for warranty work, at the dealer. A specially equipped van is used by the Department for public education and emergency response. Additional discussion on Police protection and security can be found in the Quality of Life chapter.

ISSUE: Establish adequate level of security and protection in Reading.

POLICIES:

6.1 Provide optimum number of uniformed officers on the street.

6.2 Support recommendations of the Fleet Review Team.

6.3 Continue to improve crime prevention and safety education programs.

The Reading Police Department operates the Police Academy, which is currently located in City Park. Two classes of 32 cadets each train at the facility each year.

ISSUE: The existing Police Academy facility is inadequate to meet the needs of the cadets.

POLICY:

6.4 Evaluate alternatives for providing Police Academy training.

Fire Department

Reading has a rich history of volunteer fire fighting. The first fire company in the City, and the first volunteer fire company in the nation, was Rainbow Steam Fire Company, founded in 1773. Beginning in the 1970's, consolidation of fire companies was implemented because of small facilities, antiquated buildings and overlapping service areas. Some of the City's 14 operating fire companies were combined into eight stations without a loss of coverage or effectiveness. Three of the existing firehouses are more than 100 years old and are unable to accommodate the larger modern apparatus. A study conducted in 1972 by Fire Management Associates, as well as a 1999 report by the Pennsylvania Economy League suggests that the City could be served effectively by 5 fire stations.

The current fleet of fire apparatus is in generally good condition with regular upgrades being funded by the Community Development Block Grant Program. The Fire Department's 10 year Capital Improvements Plan outlines when and where improvements are needed.

The 178 member force is made up of paid drivers and volunteer firefighters. It has become increasingly difficult to attract and retain volunteers. Programs should be developed to increase volunteerism. Occasionally very large fires or emergencies that occur simultaneously can deplete the entire on-duty force of 22 paid firefighters and all in-service apparatus, resulting in suburban fire companies being called for assistance. In those situations, an in-house contingency plan that puts off-duty personnel on reserve (spare) trucks is instituted. This insures that the rest of the City continues to be covered.

The Fire Department also provides stand-by services for fireworks and other events, fire prevention programs at schools and public events, station tours and demonstrations, and sprinkler/standpipe tests in high-rise buildings and manufacturing/industrial facilities.

ISSUE: Provide reliable and sufficient fire protection to the City.

POLICIES:

7.1 Combine or relocate firehouses at appropriate sites that maintain an effective level of coverage.

7.2 Continue to provide funding assistance for new apparatus.

7.3 Explore ways to attract and retain volunteer force.

7.4 Support ancillary services provided by Fire Department.

Located on Fritz's Island along Morgantown Road near Angelica Lake, the Fire Training Facility was conceived as a City-County joint effort in 1974 and built in phases over a 16 year period with the last phase, a classroom building, being completed in 1990. The Facility is used for fire training exercises by area fire companies and local industries. Until 1999, the City and County agreed to share operating costs evenly. Under a new agreement, pending ratification, the County would bear all operating costs, but the City's access to the facility would not be affected. The City's training officer would still maintain an office at the facility and new probationary firemen would continue to be trained there.

ISSUE: The Fire Training Facility is a valuable resource available to many Berks County fire companies.

POLICIES:

7.5 Formalize operation agreement with County of Berks.

7.6 Support upgrade of the facility in order to maintain training standards.

Wastewater Treatment and Sanitary Sewer System

The City operates the sewage treatment plant located at Fritz's Island, situated at the southernmost tip of the City along the Schuylkill River. Originally built in 1928, the plant is currently permitted up to its design capacity of 28.5 million gallons per day (MGD). This system serves approximately 140,000 people through 45,000 service connections. The only areas of the City not connected to the system are the Riverdale and Castlewood areas, which are physically isolated by the Warren Street Bypass or steep topography. In addition to the City, the system serves the Boroughs of Kenhorst and Laureldale, much of Muhlenberg Township and portions of Mt. Penn, Mohnton, Shillington, and Wyomissing Hills Boroughs and Bern, Spring, and Cumru Townships.

The treatment facility is going through a series of major upgrades to remove a moratorium on new connections that was implemented by the State Department of Environmental Protection in June 1994. The most recent improvements will allow new connections, as well as improve effluent quality and reduce odor problems that have persistently plagued the southwest part of the City for a number of years.

ISSUE: The City's wastewater treatment plant is a valuable resource that could be expanded.

POLICIES:

8.1 Improve facility to reduce odors and increase capacity.

8.2 Seek additional revenue by accepting additional wastewater from neighboring municipalities as capacity increases.

Much of the sanitary sewer system is nearly 100 years old and now consists of 165 miles of pipes. Three of the four pumping stations were built in the 1950's and 1960's in order to provide service to areas of the 18th Ward and Glenside as well as neighboring municipalities. Upgrades to the entire system have been planned that include reducing surface and ground water inflow and infiltration to the collection (sewer) system and larger pumps and piping at the pumping stations to handle increased flow from outside the City.

ISSUE: The age and size of the system requires consistent maintenance, repair and upgrading.

POLICIES:

8.3 Perform regular maintenance to system.

8.4 Develop comprehensive long-range plan for maintenance and upgrades.

Stormwater Management

The purpose of the storm drainage system is to effectively remove storm water runoff so that flooding will be prevented. The system consists of a network of approximately 70 miles of pipe, more than 3,000 catch basins and drop inlets, and various outfall and open drainage ditches. Pipes range in size from 3 inches to 20 feet in diameter and are made of brick, clay, iron or concrete. The system collects runoff throughout its network and ultimately discharges the water into the Schuylkill River or into absorption areas. The storm drainage network is independent of the sanitary sewer system. Current regulations require no treatment of the water before discharge.

The existing system is adequate even though certain problem areas do exist. Much of the system was installed between the 1880's and the 1920's with the latest major installation in the 1970's when Bernharts Creek was diverted underground in the area of Municipal Stadium. Problems such as flooding of the Spring Street Subway, inadequate sewers and catch basins throughout the City, and street drainage and infiltration in the southwest Wards persist. The last major inventory of the City's storm sewer system was conducted in 1974.

In 1972, Hurricane Agnes flooded many low-lying areas of the City along the Schuylkill River. One of the results of that storm was the creation of a regional flood control system. The implementation of this system included the creation of Blue Marsh Lake on the Tulpehocken Creek, upstream from the City. The City's Zoning and Building Codes regulate and limit development in flood prone areas to reduce property loss and liability.

Beginning in 2003 the City will be required to meet new Environmental Protection Agency standards for stormwater management. This unfunded mandate will require a city-wide stormwater drainage study as part of the permit application process. Neighboring municipalities that feed into the City system will be required to work with Reading to meet the new standards.

ISSUE: To upgrade stormwater management to meet EPA standards and to minimize property damage, environmental degradation and traffic problems associated with intense rain and flood events.

POLICIES:

9.1 Conduct system inventory to identify problem areas and develop long-range solutions.

9.2 Improve and maintain storm sewer system to meet environmental standards.

9.3 Modify stormwater and flood control management practices according to new standards.

Water Supply

In 1821, a spring near Eleventh and Court Streets provided the first public supply of water in Reading. At present, the water supply for the City is from Lake Ontelaunee. Constructed in 1926 and located about 8 miles north of the City, the Lake has a water surface area of 1,082 acres and a capacity of 3.88 billion gallons. The City owns approximately 2,060 acres surrounding the lake for protection of the watershed, most of which is maintained under an agreement with the Pennsylvania Game Commission. No recreational use of the lake is permitted except for shore

and ice fishing. A 1998 assessment made recommendations on ways to better manage and protect the watershed.

Water from Lake Ontelaunee is treated at the Maidencreek Filter Plant, which was constructed in 1935. Additions to the facility were made in 1956 and major renovations were completed in 1994. The plant's volume of treated water is 40 million gallons per day. The distribution system consists of 210 miles of water mains, 1,894 fire hydrants and 4,135 valves and has a storage capacity of 66.2 million gallons.

The Reading Area Water Authority (RAWA) was formed in 1994 to operate the City's water system. In addition to serving the City, RAWA provides water to neighboring municipalities. RAWA is the largest water supplier in Berks County and has sufficient capacity to satisfy all future demand from the region surrounding its current service area.

Since 1990, various improvements to the filter plant and infrastructure have increased the quality of the water supply. A computer program monitors the water system and assists in locating trouble spots and correcting problem; broken lines and valves have been repaired or replaced; and lines have been cleaned.

ISSUE: Continue to provide an affordable and adequate supply of clean water to customers of the City's water system.

POLICIES:

10.1 Encourage cooperation among government agencies, municipalities and private property owners in protecting the Lake Ontelaunee Watershed.

10.2 Support the expansion of the water system for additional customers.

10.3 Develop a systematic maintenance program.

Solid Waste Management

Solid waste management in Reading includes trash collection, recycling and composting of yard debris.

The City does not provide comprehensive trash collection for all its residents. In 1997 and 1998, the City instituted new permitting and licensing procedures designed to assure that trash haulers were disposing of solid waste properly. In 1999, the City passed an ordinance requiring owners of rental properties with less than 4 units to subscribe to a municipal trash collection service on behalf of their tenants (see Quality of Life). In March 2000, nearly 5,000 properties were participating in the program.

The City has a separate contract for emptying litter containers in high pedestrian traffic areas downtown. The City has hoped that by locating trash can in these areas the amount of litter on the streets would be reduced. Currently there are 100 litter containers and with continued interest, the program will be expanded.

ISSUE: Efficient and dependable trash collection services that will contribute to the cleanliness of the City.

POLICIES:

11.1 Promote expansion of trash collection program to include more residential properties.

11.2 Explore ways to reduce litter through enhanced trash collection and education.

11.3 More actively enforce existing dumping and littering laws.

11.4 Expand Street cleaning program.

The City's recycling program began in October 1990. A private firm provides residents with weekly curbside pick-up of recyclable plastic, glass, metal, and paper. The amount of residential refuse being recycled has remained at approximately 26% since inception. Complaints had been received that recycling contributes to the litter problem because the wind, animals and passersby topple containers, and the recycling contractor is irresponsible. A new style of contained was introduced in 1998 that reduces the probability of spillage.

Composting facilities for leaves are located at a site on Hill Road in Alsace Township and near the Wastewater Treatment Plant on Fritz's Island. The Parks Department reuses the composted material. The City operates a leaf collection program in the fall and will pick up yard waste such as grass clippings and small branches at no cost when requested by the property owner.

ISSUE: Reduce the amount of waste going into landfills through recycling and composting.

POLICIES:

11.5 Explore ways to improve and expand the recycling program.

11.6 Examine ways to reduce cost of recycling program.

Note: See Quality of Life Chapter for more on trash collection.

Education

The residents of Reading are provided with a wide range of educational opportunities from preschool through post-secondary. The Reading School District provides quality, Kindergarten through Grade 12 public education to all children residing in the City. The Catholic Diocese of Allentown has primary and secondary schools in the City that serves all of Berks County. Three accredited colleges are located within the City offering degrees in many fields.

Public schools in the City are operated under the authority of the Reading School District (RSD), the boundary of which coincides with the City limits. The District operates fourteen elementary schools, four middle schools, one high school, a special education center, and, in co-operation with the Muhlenberg School District, a vocational-technical school. The High School provides classrooms for grades 9 through 12 and the middle schools grades 6 through 8. In 1998, RSD had an enrollment of 14,904, a professional staff of 953, and a support staff of 711. Chronic overcrowding in the High School and several elementary schools can be relieved through the addition of new permanent classrooms.

The Catholic Diocese of Allentown has two high schools and six primary schools in the City. Central Catholic High School and Holy Name High School serve students residing in Reading as well as adjacent municipalities.

ISSUE: Continue to provide quality education to the residents of Reading.

POLICIES:

12.1 Support RSD plans for providing additional classroom space for students.

12.2 Continue to support the parochial and private schools in area.

Albright College, Alvernia College and Reading Area Community College (RACC) are located in the City. Albright and Alvernia College are 4-year private liberal arts schools with a combined student population of more than 2,600. RACC is a State and County supported community college offering career, college transfer and continuing education programs its more than 2000 students. All three institutions have been experiencing growth in both enrollment and facilities since 1975. Albright College has built new dormitories and an art center. Alvernia College has new dormitories and a campus center, and RACC built a new library and acquired buildings for additional classrooms and a campus center. Future proposals include expanding to meet the technological needs of the workforce.

ISSUE: Provide quality and convenient higher educational opportunities to area residents.

POLICY:

12.3 Support curriculum changes and building expansions at the City's colleges within their present boundaries that benefit the residents and businesses in the Reading area.

Note: See Business & Workforce Development Chapter for more education policies.

Chapter Five
Housing & Population

THE PEOPLE OF READING

The vitality of any city depends greatly upon the people who live in that city. The reasons people choose to live in a city are as varied as the people themselves. The City of Reading is no exception. Characterized by its diversity, the City's population includes both old and new immigrants, including those groups that immigrated to the City before the 20th Century such as the Irish, Italians, Germans and African-Americans. These people settled in the city to be close to the jobs that were being created by the emerging industries. People built schools, churches, parks, public institutions and homes. Today, the city is experiencing the in-migration of people from the Caribbean, Latin America, Asia and the Middle East. For many, the City is an excellent place to live and to raise a family. The proximity of schools and parks, the housing value, the availability of activities, and the sense of neighborhood apparent in many areas of the City prove to be very attractive for individuals and families of all ages, races, and backgrounds.

A CHANGING CITY

During the 20th Century, the City of Reading experienced a dramatic shift in the number of people who live within the City limits. The 1990 Census data reported that the City's population was 78,380, representing a mere 0.3% change from the population of 1900. Between these years, however, the population grew to a high of 111,171 in 1930, followed by a steady and consistent decline since that time resulting in a population loss of 30%. In 1990, the City of Reading's population was comprised of 19,165 families and 31,403 households.

The City of Reading's loss has become Berks County's gain. During the 20th Century, the population of the County as a whole increased by nearly 200,000 people, to the current figure of 358,211. At the beginning of the 20th Century, the City of Reading constituted one half of the total county population. At the close of the century, the City has only one-fifth of the total county population.

The shift of population has not occurred evenly over all income and age groups. Those leaving the City for the surrounding County tend to be higher income individuals of income-producing age and their families. Seventy percent of the City's residents have incomes that fall below 95% of the area's median family income compared to 42% in the County. Reading's high percentage of dependent persons appears to be slowly increasing. The percentage of dependent age groups (newborn to 20 years of age and those over 65 years of age) grew 0.7% from 1980 to 1990. The City experienced a 4.1% increase in its childbearing population (ages 21 to 44) from 31.9% in 1980 to 36% in 1990. Berks County (not including Reading) increased its 21-to-44 population from 35% in 1980 to 36.4% in 1990, an increase of only 1.4%. The income-producing segment (ages 21 to 64) of the City's population decreased from 53.6% in 1980 to 52.8% in 1990.

The loss of population experienced by the City during the last half century was the result of numerous factors. Most notably was the new opportunity for families to move to the rapidly developing suburbs following World War II. Federal policies during the mid-1900's did much to en-

courage this. The federally sponsored Veteran's Administration mortgages encouraged the purchase of newly constructed homes, mostly in the burgeoning suburbs. The Federal government's new interstate highway system combined with the increased affordability and availability of automobiles made people more mobile than ever before and also made the new suburbs an attractive lifestyle choice for many. As families embraced the new suburban ideal with its freestanding house and large yard, City properties became less desirable to those who could afford to buy elsewhere. This new opportunity for suburban living was not available to everyone, however. The suburban lifestyle was essentially reserved for middle- and upper-income white families. Nationwide, thousands of minorities were systematically shut out of homeownership, whether by discriminatory lending practices or segregationist restrictions imposed by local governments or the developers themselves. The City's older homes came to be less valued, becoming the only housing option in the County for many poor, minority, and immigrant families. In some cases, these families lacked the resources, the knowledge, or just the will to maintain these homes, which then began to deteriorate due to a lack of upkeep and reinvestment.

THE CITY TODAY

One of the most prominent characteristics of the City of Reading remains its racially and ethnically diverse population. The two largest minority groups, African-Americans and persons of Hispanic origin, have shown significant increases in their respective populations. In 1990, the African-American population saw a 10% growth increase over 1980 numbers. In that year, African-Americans comprised over 10% of the City's population. People of Hispanic origin grew in population by nearly 100% between 1980 and 1990 to represent nearly 20% of the City's population.

In 1990, the median housing value in the City of Reading was $37,700 compared to the County median value of $103,850. Due to out-migration of middle class families, declining housing value, and increased housing opportunities in the County, the City remains a less-than-desirable place to live for many that have the means to live in the surrounding suburbs.

ISSUE: There is a general reluctance among middle- and high-income homeowners to purchase homes in the City.

POLICIES:

1.1 Promote the availability, affordability, and desirability of housing for owner occupancy and the opportunity and benefits available to reside in Reading.

1.2 Promote the unique and historical quality of much of the existing housing.

1.3 Promote the appropriate maintenance of the housing stock.

1.4 Develop financial incentives and programs that increase the desirability of ownership in the City.

The above-mentioned demographic shift has impacted the ownership status and the quality of housing that is available in the City, creating an urban center with a housing market very different from that found in the surrounding areas. According to the 1990 Census, the City of Reading, owner-occupied units accounted for 56% of all occupied units in the City, compared to the

80% owner-occupied rate found in Berks County townships and boroughs. The vacancy rate for the City is reported at over 8%, while the County reports a rate under 4%.

The advancing age of the City's housing stock is cause for concern. The City has the highest percentage (70%) of pre-1940 housing in Berks County. Only those areas of the city annexed most recently – the 18th Ward, Glenside, Hampden Heights, and Riverdale – contain large numbers of housing units built after that period. While these homes have great charm and historical value, aging housing stock that has not been properly maintained presents many problems for residents. Outdated and poorly maintained electrical and plumbing systems along with leaking roofs and deteriorating woodwork make for an unsafe living environment. Lead paint poses a serious health threat to the young of the household. Nearly all of the homes in the City pose a potential lead paint threat since most of the homes were built before 1978, the year that the government prohibited the use of lead-based paints.

The City has received a Neighborhood Revitalization Area (NRA) designation from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The NRA is comprised of Census tracts 13, 14, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, and block groups 1, 2, and 3 of Census tract 1.This designation will allow the City to have greater flexibility in funding and administering community development activities, including housing rehabilitation activities. In addition to the NRA designation, HUD has awarded the City an Asset Control Area (ACA) designation. This designation, which includes the entire City, will allow the City to secure title to all HUD foreclosed houses, as they become available. The City has begun to work with a non-profit housing developer to acquire, rehabilitate and resell these houses to eligible homebuyers. Helping support this initiative, a group of concerned citizens have joined forces to form the Reading Revitalization Task Force. This task force will undertake activities to support the housing rehabilitation initiative. These activities will target improving the neighborhood environment in the areas of safety, cleanliness, and property upkeep.

ISSUE: A number of City residents live in housing that is not decent, safe or sanitary.

POLICY

2.1 Promote decent, safe and sanitary conditions for all residents.

2.2 Support the rehabilitation of all housing to meet minimum codes and property maintenance standards.

2.3 Promote and develop preventative maintenance programs for homeowners.

The density of housing also impacts how people enjoy their homes. High-density residential neighborhoods are associated with a host of problems that have made these neighborhoods less desirable. Lack of parking, small yards, open space and limited privacy are just a few of the issues that occur in high density areas. A 1968 land use survey shows an overall city housing density of 22 units per residential acre, one of the highest densities in the entire state. The densest neighborhoods also tend to be the City's oldest and poorest. Subsequently, the advancing age of the stock is often accompanied by a lack of maintenance and resulting deterioration in these neighborhoods.

ISSUE: Excessive housing density has a detrimental effect upon quality of life, discouraging new homebuyers and investment.

POLICY

3.1 Aggressively pursue the demolition of blighted and deteriorated housing units in high-density areas.

3.2 Support the construction of new housing units at lower densities.

3.3 Evaluate housing stock in non-residential areas for potential demolition.

3.4 Evaluate land use character in residential areas.

Whether by market conditions or by design, the City houses 37% of Berks County's low-income families, and it does so in the most concentrated (densest) configuration of any other municipality. Despite these challenges, the City of Reading maintains a goal to assure the provision to all citizens the opportunity to reside in safe and affordable housing regardless of income, race, color, religion, sex, handicap, familial status, or national origin.

ISSUE: The City accommodates a disproportionate share of the County's low-income persons and special-needs housing.

POLICY

4.1 Advocate policies at the State and federal level that support a more equitable distribution of low-income households throughout the region.

4.2 Encourage the establishment of legislation that will mandate the creation of affordable housing within the developing areas of the County as a condition for developing housing in those areas.

4.3 Offset the cost of providing services to the residents of special-needs housing by increasing contributions from County-wide sources.

4.4 Encourage the equitable development of special-needs housing throughout the County.

Note: See Land Use Chapter for more housing related policies.

Population comparison chart

Chapter Six
Business & Workforce Development

INTRODUCTION

The Business & Workforce Development component to this comprehensive plan is intended to guide the use of City funds and resources in fostering a strong tax base, increasing the skills of the local workforce and increasing the economic viability of its residents.

The City of Reading was founded in 1748 and until recently has had a rich industrial history. In the 19th Century, Reading was home to the largest company in the world, the Reading Railroad. Other common industries in the City, as well as the County of Berks included the manufacturing of clothing, hats, textiles, bricks, tobacco, hardware and steel. The City also had a number of breweries. Reading served as the retail center for the County, creating a vibrant and busy central business district. In time, some of the larger businesses such as Boscov's, Whitner's and Pomeroy's department stores, the Glen-Gery brickyard, Stichter Hardware and several others moved to the suburbs or shut their doors. As technology increased the conveniences of life and the automobile became more affordable, many residents sought to move out of the City and live in the suburbs. Muhlenberg, Exeter, Cumru, and Spring Townships began to develop rapidly and by the early 1980's the City's central business district lost its place as a commercial center with the dramatic decline in the number and variety of businesses located there. The 1990's were rebuilding years for the City as Reading worked hard to combat the loss of business, rebuild its economic base, and change its focus. While the City can no longer expect to be the commercial hub for the County, it has become a center for finance, legal, government and other service industries. Reading is also pushing toward becoming the region's cultural center with projects like the Civic Center construction and the Rajah Theater rehabilitation.

EXISTING EMPLOYMENT CONDITIONS

While some of the former major industries in the City, like the Reading Railroad can no longer provide jobs for the residents, there are hundreds of smaller companies that do. Currently, no business in the City, or in the County, employs more than 4% of the population. This is a positive situation as no one company has an economic hold on the region. This condition would allow the area to recover relatively quickly should an employer close or leave the region. The table below lists several businesses in the City that employ in excess of 1,000 people.

The Reading MSA unemployment rate for January 2000 was 4.1%. This number includes the City's unemployment rate, which was 4.8% while the national average was 3.0%. A 1.8% margin over the national average is favorable, as most urban areas are 3% -5% higher than the nation. Local employers are finding that the job market is tight in Berks County. Most economists are finding that the section of the population that wishes to be employed already holds jobs. This is a positive point in the eyes of residents, but when trying to attract new business to the area it can be a deterrent. Companies moving into this area will have to pay higher salaries in order to pull employees from an already tight market.

Company	Employees in the City of Reading
Carpenter Technology Corporation	2,682
County of Berks	2,300
Reading School District	2,276
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania	1,691
GPU Energy	1,469
St Joseph's Medical Center	1,414
Federal Offices	1,300
Dana Corporation	1,200
C N A Insurance	1,175
Sovereign Bank	1,085

Source: City of Reading Business Resource Center, June 1999

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Economic Development in itself is the practice of increasing the number of dollars being circulated in a region's economy. This is generally done in several separate functions. The first function is to create additional high-wage jobs for the residents of the region so as to increase their disposable income. This ties to the second phase, which is to increase the number of dollars being spent in a certain region. This can be done by attracting shoppers and tourists from both in and outside of the region. In order for government expenses to be met, a certain amount of tax dollars must be collected from the property owners in the City. This is a tedious practice because if the tax rate is too high, property owners leave and the economy suffers. A 1998 study of land use by the Reading Planning Office has shown that 50.5% of the acreage located within the City boundaries has tax-exempt status. This is a small increase from the 49.5% of the acreage that was tax exempt in 1978 (see Table 1, in Appendix C). The largest tax exempt uses in the City currently belong to government (139 acres), public schools (149 acres), and colleges (124 acres). Parks and playgrounds make up 470 acres, while railroads account for 136 acres. The large amount tax exempt land has led to higher taxes for the remaining property owners and creates a financial hardship as the government faces budget deficits over the next several years. It is imperative for the City leadership to rebuild the tax base and bring business back to the City. The present uses of tax-exempt properties must also be examined.

ISSUE: The City of Reading is facing a declining tax base as well as an unusually high number of tax-exempt properties compared to the surrounding area.

POLICIES:

1.1 Support development of businesses that will increase the tax base.

1.2 Encourage financial investment in taxable organizations.

1.3 Review the use of all tax-exempt properties within the City to determine if the criteria for tax-exempt operations are met.

1.4 Seek regional support for County-wide services situated in the City.

1.5 Encourage non-profit organizations to submit a payment in lieu of taxes for the services received from the City.

Underutilized Properties

There are many properties in the City that do not reach their economic potential. These sites, with proper development, could produce additional jobs and substantial tax revenues. Some of these sites include portions of the former Reading Railroad property, the south side of the 400 block of Penn Street, the Buttonwood Gateway Urban Renewal Area (URA), the Reading Station Outlet Mall, the entire north-south length of 9th Street from the outlet area to Neversink Mountain, and the vacant property on the east side of Morgantown Road. There are also several large factory buildings in the City that are underutilized or vacant, and therefore, not reaching their economic potential. Many smaller buildings, especially in the downtown area, do not provide as much economic benefit to the owners and the City as is possible. This is a result of some buildings having a commercial use on the ground floor and vacant upper floors. A majority of the downtown's once vibrant retail operations today use less than half of the space they used to occupy.

In 1998, Reading was approved for a United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) Brownfields Pilot Program. This is a monetary grant that will assist the City in taking an inventory of all potentially contaminated underutilized sites. In addition, it provides money for some testing of the sites and future assistance in the redevelopment of those sites. In 1999, Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge approved a Keystone Opportunity Zone (KOZ) (see Map 1) for the City of Reading. This zone overlaps its location with some of the Brownfield properties. The developers of these properties will not be subject to the following taxes for an 11 year period starting January 1, 1999:

Local Taxes	**State Taxes**
Earned Income/Net Profits Tax	Corporate Net Income Tax
Business Gross Receipts	Capital Stock Tax
Business Occupancy	Foreign Franchise Tax
Business Privilege	Personal Income Tax
Mercantile Tax	Sales & Use tax
City/County/School District Property Tax	
Sales & Use Tax	

ISSUE: Reading has several underutilized sites that could provide for additional tax revenues and significant job creation.

POLICIES:

2.1 Support and utilize the US Environmental Protection Agency Brownfields program.

2.2 Promote the State approved Reading Keystone Opportunity Zone.

2.3 Create and maintain a list of significant underutilized properties for use in marketing programs.

2.4 Identify areas within the City that are appropriate for focused development.

MAP 1. KOZ

City Economic Development Efforts

In 1996, the City created the Business Resource Center (BRC) to help facilitate business expansion and retention. The major focus of the BRC was to assist small business in cutting through the red tape of government to make their operations as painless as possible. The BRC currently operates as a division of the Community Development Department. The BRC staff administers the Fund for Revitalization and Economic Development (FRED) which provides low interest loans to businesses that desire to either relocate to or expand in the City. The low interest loan is given based on how many new permanent full-time jobs the project will create. The BRC is also a certified provider for the Community & Economic Development Loan Program through the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED). This is another low interest loan program for business development. These low interest loans have been the spark needed to create a multitude of private investment in the City. The City's loans only fund 25% of a project's total value, the remaining 75% of these projects have come from private funds. Some of the more successful projects for the City have included the Lincoln Plaza Hotel and Conference Center, Sweet Street Desserts, C.H. Briggs Hardware, Neversink Brewery, Dries Paint & Hardware, the Pike Café and the Ugly Oyster Pub. Over the past 5 years, 75% of the new jobs created in the City have created by existing employers.

The BRC also markets the City as a whole, as well as its other community development programs such as the commercial façade improvement program, the tax abatement program and the enterprise zone. The BRC also coordinates the aforementioned US EPA Brownfields program and the KOZ. The BRC works closely with other local community development organizations such as the Reading Downtown Improvement District, Greater Berks Development Fund, Berks County Chamber of Commerce and the Kutztown University Small Business Development Center.

ISSUE: There are a great many small successful businesses in Reading that should be retained.

POLICIES:

3.1 Investigate financial support outside Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) monies for business development.

3.2 Enhance current programs for business retention.

3.3 Develop and fund a comprehensive marketing plan for the City of Reading.

ISSUE: Because of significantly increased activity in the City, the Business Resource Center is in need of expansion.

POLICY:

4.1 Using the Community Development Block Grant Funds, expand the functions of the Business Resource Center to create an Economic Development Department.

The City of Reading Community Development Department monitors job creation and economic development in the projects that it funds. The projects are monitored for a maximum of 3 years or until their loans are paid in full. Generally, if the City does not have a financial stake in the project, it is difficult to measure the economic impact.

ISSUE: The City needs to be certain that economic growth is measured and assessed on a regular basis and that economic development projects and initiatives are monitored to determine their level of success and impact.

POLICY:

5.1 Investigate the methods by which the City could better monitor economic growth.

Outlet Development

The City of Reading is proud to be the birthplace of the factory outlet store. When the hosiery mills and apparel manufacturers would have slightly irregular or over stocked items, they offered the items at a reduced rate. This became such a popular concept that the manufacturers would often see a profit on these items. Small stores were opened in the factories for the local public to purchase these items. As time went on, the factories moved in search of the cheaper foreign labor markets but the outlet stores remained. Currently the major outlet areas are located at 8th and Oley Streets and 9th and Douglass Streets, on Hiester's Lane and at the Reading Station Outlet Mall on Spring Street in the City. The Vanity Fair Outlet Center is located at the former Berkshire Knitting Mills in Wyomissing, approximately 1 mile outside of the City limits. This concentration of stores attracts 10 million people each year and Reading has been named one of the premier shopping destinations on the East Coast.

ISSUE: The City is home to one of the most popular tourist attractions in the region and yet most of the visitors to the outlets stay in the City less than one day.

POLICIES:

6.1 Improve the aesthetics and parking situation in the outlet area.

6.2 Investigate improvements to traffic and pedestrian circulation along the North 8th and 9th Street corridors.

6.3 Examine the regulations and boundaries of the Residential – Outlet zoning district.

6.4 Investigate ways to keep the outlet shopper in the City for an extended period of time.

6.5 Strengthen the relationship between outlet centers.

6.6 Investigate and encourage any possible linkage between the outlet areas and downtown.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Workforce development is the practice of educating the City's residents and making them attractive to potential employers. This includes both the basic skills learned in public schools as well as vocational or trade skills needed to gain employment. In today's society, some of the most important skills needed to gain employment with a good income are basic reading and writing skills, computer skills and the social skills necessary to interact with people on a regular basis.

The Reading School District (RSD) provides education for children in grades Kindergarten through twelve in the City. The Catholic Dioceses of Allentown operates two high schools in the City, Central Catholic High School in the southeastern part of the City and Holy Name High School in the southwestern end. There are also in excess of 40 private and parochial schools in the area from which residents may choose. In the field of higher education, Reading is home to Albright College, a small liberal arts college, Alvernia College, a small liberal arts college affiliated with the Catholic Church, Pace Institute at 6th and Court Streets and Reading Area Community College (RACC) just adjacent to the Penn Street Bridge. RACC offers a quality education, with an open enrollment and an affordable price. Many students use RACC to prepare themselves to enter a 4-year program. Kutztown University of Pennsylvania operates the Edge Center, a special center for business education at 5th and Penn Streets in the central business district. Kutztown offers a special program for minorities and women who would like to own their own business. Within 15 miles of the City limits are the Berks-Lehigh Valley Campus of the Pennsylvania State University, Berks Technical Institute and the main campus of Kutztown University of Pennsylvania. Reading is also home to several trade schools such as Randy Rick, Raylon and Renbow; all in the hair care industry. In addition, Reading is home to a Team PA Career Link Center, which opened in 1999. This center combines the employment resources of the County and the Commonwealth under one roof, minimizing the confusion of trying to find employment or job training.

The Reading School District is home to over 15,200 students each day. The District provides a comprehensive learning program including special education and programs for students who may use English as a second language. There are college preparatory classes and also programs available for students who may wish to pursue a career in a vocational or technical field.

The Reading School District faces many challenges in educating its students. It is shown below that the District must educate a student body of which over half falls under the poverty level. This is a dramatically higher amount than any other district in the County and again shows that Reading continues to suffer the burden of housing the majority of the County's low-income population.

Another major concern for the District is the high dropout rate of the student body. A high dropout rate can negatively affect a local economy as potential employers may avoid opening a business in the area because of a lack of qualified employees. Most employers in today's labor market will not hire someone without a high school diploma. Individuals who do leave before graduation often become a drain on social programs such as welfare and unemployment compensation.

Below is a comparison of the Reading School District to the 5 largest districts in Berks County with regards to poverty and dropout rates. Antietam, Muhlenberg, and Wyomissing School Districts were added to this list, as they are contiguous to the Reading School District. All information below was collected from the Pennsylvania Department of Education and is based on the 1998-1999 school year.

School District Enrollment Below Poverty Level

School District	Percent of Enrollment Under Poverty Level
Reading	64.3%
Antietam	9.2%
Boyertown Area	7.1%
Exeter	11.9%
Governor Mifflin	6.5%
Muhlenberg	11.7%
Twin Valley	10.6%
Wilson	6.7%
Wyomissing	8.0%
Pennsylvania Average	31.7%

Dropouts by Grade, 1998-1999

	Percentage of Total Enrollment Dropping Out			
School District	**Grade 9**	**Grade 10**	**Grade 11**	**Grade 12**
Reading	7.8%	8.7%	11.9%	9.7%
Antietam	1.4%	0.0%	6.0%	0.0%
Boyertown Area	0.0%	2.5%	3.0%	1.9%
Exeter	0.0%	2.0%	4.0%	1.3%
Governor Mifflin	0.6%	0.3%	2.2%	1.3%
Muhlenberg	0.4%	3.7%	5.3%	3.9%
Twin Valley	1.3%	5.1%	5.8%	6.2%
Wilson	0.0%	1.1%	3.3%	1.9%
Wyomissing	0.7%	3.1%	0.7%	0.0%
Pennsylvania Average	2.8%	4.0%	4.7%	4.2%

A1997 Pennsylvania Department of Education survey noted that graduates of the Reading School District go on to a variety of different endeavors upon graduation. The table below compares RSD graduates with the Pennsylvania average. A disturbing fact of this report is that almost 1 in 4 students in the senior class of Reading High School have no post graduation plans. This again is a problem for the local economy as these students generally shuffle from job to job while a proportion of them will remain unemployed, never seeking legitimate employment.

	Percent of Students	
Graduate Intention	**Reading School**	**Commonwealth**

	District	Average
Post-secondary degree granting institution	50.5%	68.8%
Post-secondary non degree granting institutions	5.5%	3.8%
Obtain a Job	13.8%	14.4%
Military	5.3%	3.9%
Homemaking	1.6%	0.6%
No Plans	23.3%	8.5%

ISSUE: The City and School District work together to better prepare youth to enter the work-force.

POLICIES:

7.1 Promote partnerships with school district and community groups to better reach students considering leaving school before graduation.

7.2 Encourage partnerships with local educational institutions and create a coalition to better train the City's residents.

7.3 Support the plans for a proposed technology center on RACC campus.

7.4 Encourage and support efforts of the Team PA Career Link Center for workforce development.

Chapter Seven

Quality of Life

INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

"Quality of life" encompasses all those intangible aspects of a community that affect its desirability as a place to live, work and visit, such as its appearance, cultural resources, reputation. What constitutes a high quality of life may vary according to an individual's physical needs, cultural background, lifestyle choice and personal taste. The values that are expressed here are based upon the input provided by City residents at the beginning of the planning process along with the contributions of the Quality of Life task force. The following list shows the topics addressed in the order presented, a continuum starting with the purely physical aspects of the community and ending with the most intangible qualities.

PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES

- Recreational Assets
- Streetscape
- Cleanliness
- Cultural Resources
- Historic Districts
- Security
- Noise
- Multi-Culturalism
- Community Pride

INTANGIBLE ATTRIBUTES

EXISTING CONDITIONS AND ANALYSIS

Recreational Assets

The City's parks, playgrounds, and public open spaces are the most obvious elements of our recreational assets. In addition to the formal parks and recreational areas, Reading is fortunate to be surrounded by highly visible natural areas. The Mt. Penn and Neversink Mountain Reserves are not particularly large – and are not even wholly within the City – but their elevation and location make them visible from almost every part of the City. Even Charles Evans Cemetery – not what one would normally consider a recreational area – provides a scenic asset and a green place to walk in a densely developed part of the City. Spaces like these are important to the quality of life, regardless of whether they are developed for formal recreational use. These areas provide visual relief, a place to enjoy fine weather and a setting for communal activities. The Community Facilities & Services chapter of this document contains more detailed information about the City's recreational resources.

Recreational assets are not limited to City-owned spaces, but include also lands belonging to the Reading School District, Berks County, private conservancies, and other private organiza-

tions. In light of the City's current financial distress, it has been noted that it may be appropriate for some of these other entities to assume some of the financial burden for the City-owned properties that serve residents beyond the City limits. It is anticipated that the comprehensive park plan described below will address which City facilities would be appropriate for such an arrangement as well as whom the potential partners would be.

Reading's recreational assets are not limited to facilities, but include activities like the summer concert series at the City Park Bandshell and JazzFest. The City's recreational assets are not only critical elements of quality of life for the residents, but are attractions for visitors as well. While the Reading area is already a mecca for shoppers attracted by the retail outlets, visitors to the outlets rarely stay overnight. It is the large-scale events – like the JazzFest – that have the potential to persuade people to stay for longer periods, providing a stimulus for businesses such as hotels, restaurants, and other services. Events like the Duryea Hill Climb build upon local history, and the former Scenic River Days festival took advantage of the City's natural assets. The Sovereign Center, now under construction, will provide an additional venue for such events. These activities and others like them are not just entertainment, but they increase the community pride of residents, promote local businesses, and enhance the City's reputation abroad. The City's cultural assets are discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

The City's Parks and Recreation Division is in the process of developing a comprehensive plan for the City's recreation and open space assets. This plan will address the assets in detail along with maintenance, the expansion or further development of existing facilities, and whatever need there may be to develop new recreational or open space areas.

ISSUE: Parks, playgrounds, playing fields, and open spaces are important City assets, critical to the maintenance of Reading's quality of life.

POLICIES:

1.1 Develop and implement a comprehensive parks, recreation, and open space plan that will address the maintenance of existing facilities, assess the need for additional facilities, and describe strategies for funding.

1.2 Seek to establish co-operative arrangements with other organizations for the maintenance and operation of recreational facilities and public open spaces.

1.3 Seek out co-operative arrangements with surrounding municipalities and the County for the maintenance and potential expansion of existing open space facilities that serve the region or extend through multiple jurisdictions.

ISSUE: Visitors attracted by the outlets rarely stay overnight; there is a need to develop and/or promote attractions that will encourage visitors to stay longer.

POLICIES:

1.4 Develop assets, attractions and events to increase the City's desirability as a place to visit, although not at the expense of the quality of life for those that live and work here.

1.5 Develop closer ties to the Berks County Convention and Visitors Bureau, which is already located in the City, to promote City events.

1.6 Recruit corporate sponsorships for multi-day events to reduce the financial and administrative burden on the City and to benefit from their marketing expertise.

Streetscape

The streetscape includes the combination of building facades, streets, sidewalks, street furniture, lighting, signs, street trees and public art, along with adjacent parks and public spaces. All of these streetscape elements need to be addressed by an overall design and management plan. Such a plan would assure that these elements work together to create a pleasing overall effect. It should also identify ways to enhance existing public spaces, the potential to develop new ones, and funding strategies to provide for the maintenance of these spaces, as well as the overall streetscape. This plan could be an element of a comprehensive open space and recreation plan or an independent document. Some streetscape elements are addressed in other sections of this chapter as well as in the Transportation chapter of this document. The following text specifically deals with street trees, street furniture (including signs), lighting, and public art.

STREET TREES – There are currently about eight thousand street trees in the City. The City Shade Tree Commission is a group of citizen volunteers who are responsible for planning the placement of new street trees, the replacement of existing street trees when necessary, and the maintenance of trees within the public right-of-way. The Parks Division of the City's Department of Public Works provides staff and technical support to the Commission. The Commission's planting and maintenance program replaces the three hundred or so trees that are lost each year to disease, accident, or removal to accommodate development activity.

There are definite benefits of a well-defined street landscaping program and of street trees in particular. Street trees can be used to define and enhance neighborhoods. Research shows that street trees increase property values, provide shade and a cooling effect during the summer, absorb street noise and improve air quality by trapping dust and giving off oxygen. Despite the benefits, street trees must be selected, placed and maintained with care. Appropriate tree species must be hardy and salt-resistant with root systems that do not break up adjacent sidewalks and street paving. Trees that have large leaves that clog storm drains or that drop fruit should be avoided. Trees with very dense or low foliage may not be compatible with public safety and trees must be maintained to keep them from blocking street lights.

STREET FURNITURE – Street furniture includes those elements placed in the public areas such as streetlights, signs, benches, litter baskets, kiosks, bus stop shelters and decorative planters. The City adopted a new design theme for streetlights, paving and street trees along Penn Street in the early 1990's. Since then, that design has been extended in the downtown as opportunity has allowed.

Signs should be informative as well as attractive. On State roads, the State Department of Transportation (PennDOT) controls the design and placement of signs; elsewhere, this is the

responsibility of the City through the Department of Public Works. Signage is critical not only for street names and route numbers, but to direct traffic to City attractions, institutions and parking facilities. Signs should be evaluated periodically to be sure that they are in good repair, legible and provide current information. New signs should be designed and placed in accordance with a comprehensive traffic management strategy. For more on the streetscape, see the Transportation Chapter.

PUBLIC ART – The City's public art includes various monuments as well as commissioned artwork throughout the City. Much of the commissioned artwork has been placed through the efforts of the Reading Redevelopment Authority, through the recommendations of its Fine Arts Board. Funds are generated by the fine arts levy required of projects built on land owned by the Redevelopment Authority. The charge requires that one percent of the total construction costs of new projects in these areas must be designated for public artwork. There are monuments honoring various groups – war veterans most notably – throughout City Park. In commemoration of the City's 250th Anniversary in 1998, the Authority has commissioned a modern sculpture for the corner of Second and Penn Streets.

ISSUE: Street trees provide numerous benefits. Proper maintenance and propagation is necessary in order for these benefits to continue.

POLICY

2.1 Continue to support the efforts of the Shade Tree Commission to increase the number of street trees in the City and to maintain the existing trees in an attractive, healthy condition.

ISSUE: The City's streetscape is an important public space. Streetscape features need to be designed and maintained to promote their aesthetic and practical benefits.

POLICIES:

2.2 Improve signage to eliminate damaged, illegible, and outdated directional signs guiding visitors to City attractions and parking areas.

2.3 Develop a comprehensive management plan to maintain and to assure the continued usefulness of street furniture in public rights-of-way and other public spaces.

2.4 Promote public education and awareness of the City's public art.

Note: See Transportation Chapter for more streetscape policies.

Cleanliness

This section addresses trash collection, litter, graffiti, vacant lots, dilapidated structures, and general nuisances. Street cleaning is discussed in the Transportation chapter of this document.

TRASH COLLECTION – Reading does not provide trash collection as a municipal service for most residents. Instead, most property owners contract with one of 32 licensed private haulers for trash collection. City voters endorsed this arrangement by rejecting a proposed municipal collection plan in an April 1998 referendum. Proponents of the municipal plan observed that the

system of private haulers was vulnerable to abuse. Under the private hauler system, each property owner is responsible for collection arrangements, but there is no reliable system for the City to assure that all property owners have contracted with a licensed hauler. Property owners who do not have such a contract are generally suspected of illegal dumping. Rightly or wrongly, the owners of small rental properties are frequently accused of this. After the Referendum, the City began to explore other ways to eliminate illegal dumping. One of these was the passage of Bill #22-99, commonly known as the "Trash Ordinance," in August 1999. This ordinance requires that non-resident owners of small rental properties (four or fewer residential units) as well as chronic violators of the Solid Waste Ordinance subscribe to a City collection system. City residents who own their own homes may also subscribe to the City program if desired. As of February 2000, there were 4,826 properties in the City collection system, representing 7,275 residential units and including 211 voluntary customers.

A City-wide recycling program collects most kinds of paper, many plastics and metal food cans on a weekly basis. This significantly reduces the City's trash stream, but the system has room for improvement.

The issues of litter and trash collection are closely related since illegal dumping is blamed for much of the litter that accumulates on vacant properties and is subsequently blown around the neighborhood. The litter problem is made worse by a lack of litter baskets in areas with heavy pedestrian traffic. The recently enacted Trash Ordinance, described above, is intended to address the illegal dumping problem. Furthermore, the City is in the process of installing additional litter containers in public areas downtown, and new regulations hold convenience stores responsible for keeping their immediate surroundings free from litter.

GRAFFITI – Graffiti damages property, but the affects of that damage extend beyond the defaced structure to the surrounding neighborhood, contributing to a sense of disorder and lawlessness. Other cities have battled graffiti by involving neighborhood groups in graffiti-plagued areas. One especially positive way of doing this is by creating murals on walls that would otherwise be a target for graffiti. These murals are ideally created by the neighborhood or by a local school to give the residents a sense of ownership of that artwork and its maintenance. Reading has several such murals now. To date, defacement has been minimal and quickly repaired. Furthermore, it appears that graffiti on nearby properties has also been reduced. In addition to this approach, the City has recently adopted an Anti-Graffiti Ordinance that allows City workers to remove graffiti from private property.

VACANT LOTS, DILAPIDATED BUILDINGS, and NUISANCES – Vacant lots and buildings are not merely unattractive, but are deemed nuisances since they undesirable activities such as illegal dumping, vagrancy and illicit drug activity. Obviously, these activities have an effect upon the whole neighborhood, not just a single property. There is no easy solution to the challenges presented by vacant and dilapidated properties, although a number of cities have developed strategies with varying degrees of success. One particular difficulty is that the properties are usually private, and finding the owners is not always easy. Other nuisances – illegal sidewalk vending, abandoned cars, unkempt yards, and noise – are not necessarily hazardous, but still detract from the quality of a neighborhood.

ISSUE: Litter and illegally dumped trash are persistent problems in the City, creating a poor impression upon visitors as well as real hazards to public health and fire safety.

POLICIES:

3.1 Enforce the Trash Ordinance aggressively and monitor its effectiveness in reducing the illegal dumping of trash and litter on vacant lots.

3.2 Develop a co-operative relationship between the licensed trash haulers and the City's Solid Waste Management Office in order to identify ways to improve the timeliness and efficiency of waste collection.

3.3 Expand street cleaning program to assure that more streets are cleaned frequently and regularly.

3.4 Assure timely, consistent pick-up of recyclables.

3.5 Enforce property maintenance regulations more aggressively to encourage better care of private yard areas.

3.6 Provide more litter receptacles in areas with high pedestrian traffic and in the vicinity of convenience stores, fast-food restaurants and similar retailers where patrons may discard materials upon leaving.

Note: See Community Facilities Chapter for more trash collection policies.

ISSUE: Graffiti not only damages property, but it also imparts a sense of disorder and lawlessness that is detrimental to property values and quality of life generally.

POLICIES:

3.7 Continue to enforce the City's Anti-Graffiti Ordinance while exploring ways to make the ordinance and enforcement provisions more effective.

3.8 Investigate graffiti control measures that have proven effective in other cities.

3.9 Support and expand programs that contribute to neighborhood pride, such as the creation of murals on otherwise blank walls by neighborhood residents, while discouraging graffiti and other defacement of property.

ISSUE: There are a variety of "nuisance" activities and physical eyesores that are not necessarily hazardous but detract from the appearance of the City and the overall quality of life.

POLICIES:

3.10 Develop a comprehensive strategy to address means by which vacant lots can be redeveloped for a use compatible with surrounding neighborhood. Such a strategy should consider the size and configuration of lots, adjacent uses, needs/desires of nearby residents and development potential.

3.11 Develop a strategy to inventory, assess and prioritize remediation of vacant structures, including a method of remediation appropriate for each circumstance.

3.12 Develop a strategy to regulate features that provide a public benefit but that, uncontrolled, have the potential to become a hazard or nuisance. Such features may include sidewalk vendors, outdoor vending machines, pay telephones and billboards.

3.13 Enforce existing nuisance ordinances aggressively.

Cultural Resources

Cultural resources are those elements – both physical structures and institutions – that promote or preserve our society and its heritage. Our society has origins as diverse as the people which comprise it, so our "culture" is always changing, expanding to include a wider and wider range of things that our residents admire, treasure or aspire to in some way. Culture may be a source of entertainment, but not all entertainment is necessarily cultural. The cultural resources discussed here include traditional museums, the performing arts and sports.

MUSEUMS – Museums are the buildings that contain artifacts of our culture. In the past, museums were static displays presented for thoughtful contemplation. Today, museums are more interactive, and curators are making more of an effort to educate their patrons. Berks County has a wide variety of museums and historic sites; the following text is limited to discussion of museum facilities within the City limits.

- The **Reading Public Museum**, located at the western edge of the City, features exhibits of fine arts and natural history. The Museum contains important items of local provenance along with extensive collections of more exotic things, reflecting a mission to show to local residents the world and Reading's place in it rather than to provide a record of purely local history and achievements. The Museum is adjacent to the **Reading Planetarium**. The Planetarium is an educational resource for schoolchildren from all over Berks County and also runs seasonally appropriate programs that are available to the general public. The Reading School District owns both the Museum and the Planetarium.
- The **Historical Society of Berks County**, located along Centre Avenue near Charles Evans Cemetery, focuses upon the history of the City and Berks County, featuring numerous artifacts of local significance and extensive records of the County's early years. The Society's collection of Pennsylvania German ("Dutch") artifacts and memorabilia is particularly important.
- The **Central Pennsylvania African-American Museum** opened in October 1998 in the former Old Bethel A.M.E. Church at 119 North Tenth Street. African-American craftsmen built the structure in 1837, and it is believed to be the oldest church constructed for an African-American congregation still standing in the County. In the years before the Civil War, the church was a stop on the Underground Railroad.
- The **Berks Arts Council** is located in **The Pagoda**, one of the City's best-known and most prominent landmarks. The Council facility features a small gallery space that exhibits work by local artists.

In addition to these museums, Albright College and the Reading Area Community College have galleries to present the works of students, alumni and others.

PERFORMING ARTS – Reading features a remarkable range of performing arts organizations. The **Reading Symphony Orchestra** (RSO) and the **Reading Pops** provide regular concerts of

classical and popular music. The **Reading Choral Society** and the **Reading Civic Opera Society** offer regular concerts of choral music, and the **Berks Ballet Theatre** features dance, sometimes as a joint production with the RSO. The **Rajah Theatre** is an important venue for each of these organizations and hosts productions by professional touring companies as well. The Rajah is currently slated for an urgently needed renovation as part of the Civic Center project. As the City's only large venue for the performing arts, this renovation is critical if the City is to retain its prominence as the cultural center of the region, preventing performance groups from leaving the City for suburban locations. The City Park **Bandshell** is another performing arts venue and is the site of a popular summer concert series.

Inaugurated in 1991, the **Berks JazzFest** lasts for a week every March and features numerous concerts by world-famous and lesser-known jazz artists in venues throughout Reading and its immediate suburbs. At this time, JazzFest is probably the most significant cultural event in the City in terms of drawing visitors from outside of Berks County.

The **Genesius Theatre** and the **Reading Community Players** are active community organizations that present live amateur theatrical performances. Each organization owns and maintains its own theatre facility in the City.

Finally, the local high schools and the fine arts departments of the colleges all sponsor performances that are open to the general public.

SPORTS – Reading has two professional sports teams. The **Reading Phillies** are the double-A affiliate of major league baseball's Philadelphia Phillies. The "R-Phils" play at **GPU Stadium,** an 8,800-seat facility located along Centre Avenue near the northern edge of the City. The **Reading Rage** plays professional soccer in the Northern Conference of the D-III League of the USL (United Soccer Leagues). The Rage plays at various area venues, but generally considers Central Catholic Stadium in nearby St. Lawrence as its home field. In addition to the professional teams, the public schools, parochial schools, and colleges all field teams in a variety of sports with games open to the general public. The Reading School District and Albright College both maintain sports stadiums in the City.

All of these assets suggest an opportunity to develop the City further as a center for culture and entertainment, since people are already accustomed to coming to the City for these types of events. The soon-to-be-completed **Sovereign Center** and the imminent renovation of the Rajah Theatre will provide even greater attractions for the City. The Berks County Convention Center Authority (BCCCA) will own and maintain both of these facilities, responsible for contracting for professional management services. The BCCCA intends to operate these facilities as complementary venues. The Sovereign Center will accommodate trade shows, some spectator sports and large-scale musical and theatrical productions. In contrast, the Rajah will be a more traditional "fine arts" setting with finer acoustics, a smaller seating capacity and a more intimate environment appropriate for orchestral concerts and plays.

ISSUE: The City features a concentration of cultural opportunities, many of which are not available in the suburbs or even in other similarly sized cities. The City needs to continue its efforts to build upon this strength.

POLICIES:

4.1 Promote the City's cultural opportunities throughout and beyond the region.

4.2 Utilize the City Events Coordinator to facilitate the appropriate scheduling of events.

4.3 Explore the potential for new venues for cultural events.

ISSUE: Assure a positive experience for those coming to the City to attend a cultural event.

POLICIES:

4.4 Co-ordinate event scheduling with the Police Department, DID, the Parking Authority, and similar agencies to assure an ample supply of qualified personnel to address visitor needs and questions.

4.5 Enhance the appearance and functioning of the pedestrian and vehicular corridors connecting downtown attractions.

4.6 Provide local businesses with event schedules so that they may adjust their working hours if necessary to serve potential customers attending events.

4.7 Promote the development of businesses, services, and facilities that will complement and support large-scale events such as those to be held at the Sovereign Center.

Historic Districts

The architecture of Reading is the most prominent record of the City's history, and residents at neighborhood meetings frequently noted the high value that they placed upon the City's history and architecture. The City has three State-designated historic districts (Map 1). The State designation is important since it makes available State Historic Tax Credits for non-residential rehabilitation projects; it also indicates that all three are eligible for national register designation. The Historical Architectural Review Board (HARB), with the assistance of the City's Historic Preservation Specialist, administers and enforces the City's historic preservation regulations. The districts are described below in alphabetic order.

The **Callowhill Historic District** covers the nine-block corridor of Fifth Street from Buttonwood Street south to Laurel Street. Fifth Street was originally named Callowhill Street in honor of Hannah Callowhill Penn, mother of Thomas and Richard Penn who founded the City of Reading. The Callowhill District features structures in a variety of architectural styles in an area of 253 acres, on 331 sites. This was Reading's first historic district.

The **Centre Park Historic District** is in the north-central part of the City, surrounding the small park that gives its name to the District. It is an almost entirely residential area consisting of 840 sites that feature a wide variety of architectural styles and a high level of craftsmanship. Most of
Map 1 HISTORIC DISTRICTS

the residential development occurred between 1895 and 1915 when trolley service made the neighborhood one of Reading's first suburbs.

The **Prince Historic District** includes over 800 sites along the Sixth Street corridor between Cherry and Canal Streets. The area is predominantly residential, but it includes significant examples of ecclesiastical and commercial architecture. About three-quarters of the existing buildings were constructed between 1850 and 1890.

ISSUE: The City's architecture is an important asset that sets the City apart from its suburbs and from other cities.

POLICY:

5.1 Continue support of the City's Historic Preservation Office.

5.2 Encourage communication between property owners within the historic districts and the Historical Architectural Review Board in order to foster new development that is sensitive to the historical context.

5.3 Explore the potential for increased economic benefits for owners of property within historic districts.

ISSUE: The establishment of historic districts not only protects architectural resources, but also becomes a focus of pride for residents and has the potential to create a greater sense of community within that district.

POLICY:

5.4 Evaluate potential of areas originally identified as eligible for historic designation to determine if they are still eligible; initiate dialogue with residents of eligible areas to determine their interest in historic district designation.

5.5 Evaluate the viability of the existing historic districts.

5.6 Explore the potential for creating additional historic districts. (See Land Use, Policy 2.6)

Security

The topic of security is related to safety: the City and its neighborhoods not only need to be safe, but people must feel safe as well. Most City residents who attended the neighborhood meetings stated that they felt safe in their neighborhood, but that there were other parts of the City that they considered dangerous. The Police Department has had notable success in reducing serious crimes, as documented by the annual Uniform Crime Report. Despite this, there is still a pervasive notion that the City is unsafe, especially among non-residents. This perception is fed by the appearance of some neighborhoods, and with some justification: police note that vacant and dilapidated buildings are frequently used for drug-related and other illicit activities. Progress is hindered in part by poor community relations in some neighborhoods. Some residents say that the police are disinterested and uninvolved in the community. Conversely, some members of the Police Department claim that their accomplishments are not acknowledged. These attitudes have led to mutual distrust and a lack of co-operation with some elements of the community.

The Reading Police Department developed a formal "Comprehensive Crime Reduction Strategy" in 1998 to address both the objective and the subjective elements of public safety over a five-year period. The strategy provides a three-part approach to reduce drug and street crime. The components of this approach include enforcement, prevention and education.

ISSUE: Despite documented success in crime reduction, further progress is hindered by an attitude of distrust and a lack of co-operation between the Police Department and some members of the community.

POLICIES:

6.1 Increase friendly interaction between police officers and neighborhood residents as a way to develop mutual trust and a co-operative relationship.

6.2 Develop strategies to place police officers in neighborhoods on a frequent basis in ways that are non-threatening and not necessarily directly related to law enforcement activity.

6.3 Encourage police officers to live in the City.

6.4 Encourage police officers to participate in community and neighborhood events in unofficial capacities.

Security is more than police protection. Police are working with neighborhood groups throughout the City to develop and to maintain citizen Crime Watch groups, whereby residents actively promote the safety of their own communities. The Downtown Improvement District (DID), an association of downtown business owners, also provides its own security patrols within the downtown area. Finally, the City continues to upgrade street lighting as part of its strategy to deter illicit activity. Using lighting as a crime deterrent requires not only the provision of lights, but the maintenance of those lights as well as street trees to be sure that they do not block lighting. Building design can also facilitate public safety by minimizing dark spots and the number of secluded areas out of the public view.

ISSUE: Public safety is the responsibility of everyone, not just the Police Department. There is a need to identify ways to enhance safety and the perception of safety that do not rely solely upon the Police Department.

POLICY:

6.5 Support the security efforts of DID, assuring the continued co-operation of and effective co-ordination with the Police Department.

6.6 Support existing Crime Watch groups and encourage the development of new ones.

6.7 Continue to upgrade and to maintain street and sidewalk lighting as deterrents to criminal activity.

6.8 Maintain street landscaping such that street lighting remains an effective crime deterrent.

6.9 Discourage the construction of buildings that obstruct lighting of streets and sidewalks or that create outdoor spaces concealed from public view.

Noise

Noise may diminish the quality of life where there is an inappropriate combination of land uses in a small area. Zoning regulations can address this by prohibiting such combinations, like manufacturing activities in residential areas. However, the land uses that comply with City regulations are not the principal source of problem noise, and sometimes the noise is only a symptom of a more serious issue. Furthermore, tolerance for noise varies widely among individuals, and some very loud noises – like fire sirens – are not only acceptable, but are necessary for public safety. Add to this the fact that cities are generally noisy places, and the complexity of the issue becomes obvious. City residents have specifically cited traffic noise as a problem, naming large trucks, loud engines, vehicles travelling at excessive speed and loud car radios as the principal culprits. The City has noise ordinances to address these situations, but enforcement is difficult.

ISSUE: Excessive noise has a detrimental impact upon quality of life.

POLICIES:

7.1 Continue to enforce existing noise regulations.

7.2 Evaluate zoning and development regulations to determine if there are still ways to minimize land-use related noise in residential areas.

7.3 Research noise controls used by other communities and evaluate their potential usefulness for Reading.

Multi-Culturalism

Cities have always been gathering places for individuals from diverse backgrounds and various lifestyles. While there are sometimes conflicts, the variety makes City life interesting. Ethnic groups in Reading include those of European origin (69.2%), Hispanic (19.6%), African-American (10.1%) and a relatively small number of Asian heritage (1.1%).[1] The most obvious cultural differences exist among these different ethnic groups and their national sub-groups.

In Reading and elsewhere, ethnic groups often concentrate in specific neighborhoods. While the City firmly supports the right of every individual to choose his or her home based solely upon personal preference and budget, distinctly ethnic neighborhoods can benefit the City as they develop and promote themselves as attractions. The Centre Park area, although not an ethnic community, provides a model for this. In Centre Park, a well-organized neighborhood association arranges events throughout the year that attract people from well beyond the City limits. Other neighborhoods can emulate this example, but it requires commitment as well as effective communication, organization and planning on the part of the residents and businesses of that neighborhood.

ISSUE: Reading is home to a variety of ethnic groups. These ethnic groups have diverse cultures with the potential to create a rich environment for the residents and an attraction for visi-

[1] Percentages are based upon 1996 estimates provided by the Berks County Housing Council.

tors. Currently, too few groups realize their potential to attract visitors from beyond their immediate neighborhood.

POLICY:

8.1 Establish regular communication with representatives of existing cultural organizations to identify means by which the City can assist in the development and success of their communities.

8.2 Assist cultural and ethnic organizations with the articulation of goals and objectives where these may be lacking or not clearly stated.

8.3 Co-ordinate events sponsored by cultural and ethnic groups to foster synergy with concurrent events.

Community Pride

Community pride is one of the more nebulous quality-of-life issues. It is more than just an emotional response to the environment: community pride is critical to the well-being of the City as it affects the actions of individuals and groups. Community pride is at least part of the reason that people maintain their homes, support local businesses, take responsibility for their neighborhood's public areas and participate in the life of the community. The cumulative effect of a number of people acting in this way creates a noticeable benefit to the quality of life. This can awaken a spirit community pride in others, affecting their actions and creating an upward spiral of improvement and community health that eventually attracts the attention of people beyond the community.

Many who attended neighborhood meetings expressed their pride by speaking highly of their neighborhoods; many also noted the lack of community pride displayed by many of the people that they knew. Although "pride" is intangible, it produces actions that are readily visible and measurable. One measure of pride is the level of participation by residents in the government process. There are a wide variety of opportunities for participation. Some of these opportunities, like voting or attending public meetings, require only minimal commitment. Opportunities requiring more commitment include serving on advisory or regulatory boards, volunteering with a neighborhood-based organization, or running for public office.

It is increasingly difficult to get people to serve on various boards and authorities, let alone run for office. A number of factors may contribute to this: a diminishing sense of public responsibility, a lack of willingness to get involved, less time available due to family and work responsibilities, fear of being personally liable for actions of the agency, loss of privacy, or a lack of willingness to commit oneself to put in the time necessary to do the job. Elective offices smack of "politics," which some may find distasteful. In addition, there is an increasing number of non-profit organizations – some of which are assuming functions once performed by government – that claim time and resources from people who might otherwise serve in local government. Finally, there is a dismal lack of participation even in actions that require virtually no commitment: voter participation is extremely low, even when important offices are being decided. In the 1999 mayoral election, only about 30% of registered City voters actually voted. This disturbing trend is not limited to Reading but is sadly consistent with national patterns.

ISSUE: Many residents have pride in their neighborhoods, but are less committed to the City as a whole and do not appreciate the City's potential to succeed.

POLICIES:

9.1 Encourage and build upon the core group of neighborhoods and individuals that have already shown their commitment to improving the City.

9.2 Develop a marketing and education program to promote the City's assets and opportunities for public involvement.

ISSUE: Fewer and fewer residents are participating in local government at even the most basic level. Some have the perception that the City government does not encourage citizen participation.

POLICIES:

9.3 Develop more pro-active methods to solicit constructive citizen participation in governmental processes.

9.4 Explore ways to make City officials more accessible to residents.

9.5 Nurture local leadership and participation in City government.

Chapter Eight

Regionalism

INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

In Pennsylvania, the local governments – townships, boroughs, and cities – have the authority to tax, to plan for and regulate land uses, to plan for and to provide public sewerage and water service, and the responsibility to maintain the public roads within their boundaries.[2] This system worked well when people lived, worked and socialized in the same community, since the government to which they paid all their taxes was responsible for assuring their level of services and quality of life. Problems arose when people became more mobile.

The construction boom that followed World War II saw the development of extensive suburban communities featuring housing at a much lower density than what was in the old cities. These new suburbs accommodated a lifestyle that became the American ideal. This lifestyle more or less assumed that the homeowner would commute elsewhere to work, and – with very few exceptions – required automobile ownership. This new, low-density development rapidly spread outward from old central cities. Where cities could annex land easily, they did so in order to capture the new development and the tax revenue that it generated. Annexation was more difficult in Pennsylvania, where the cities were physically surrounded by other units of local government. Pennsylvania law made annexation even more difficult in some cases by allowing townships to organize as a "township of the first class." This designation made annexation of land by an adjoining city or borough all but impossible.[3] As a result, the suburbs of a single Pennsylvania city typically include dozens of local governments. Since each local government had its own development regulations and its own attitude toward growth, the new development flowed along the path of least resistance, resulting in a land use pattern that was even less efficient than what was happening where cities had annexation power. In the northeastern part of the country, the issue of inefficiency was perhaps more severe since much of the new construction was not due to increasing population, but by people and businesses moving out from the central cities. This was not really growth, just dispersion. As a result, many central cities were left with large areas characterized by vacant buildings. When major retailers began to leave downtown for the suburban malls – or went out of business due to the competition from those malls – the vacancies became conspicuous. Across the country, once vibrant downtown areas grew desolate, and people began to avoid them. Property values fell, resulting in a loss of tax revenue to those cities that could not capture new development by annexation. City services suffered, and many of the remaining households that could afford to leave did so, furthering the trend of disinvestment. Cities developed a reputation as dying places where only the poor and elderly lived, served by meager retail services.

The terms "urban decay" and "urban blight" were frequently used to describe the decline being experienced by the cities. Eventually, a whole range of societal ills – violent crime, drug abuse, deteriorating property values, declining population, economic disinvestment – came to be thought of as "urban," with the implication that they were somehow *only* urban and that the suburbs could not be affected by them. By the close of the 20th Century, this perception started to change as people began to realize that these "urban" problems had crossed the City line. The

[2] Public roads in Pennsylvania are either part of the State system or part of the municipal system. Federal highways – the U.S. Routes and the Interstates – are considered part of State system; there are no County roads. Day-to-day maintenance of State roads is performed by the local government, which receives funding from the State in exchange for this service.

[3] Berks County has three townships of the first class. Two of them – Cumru and Muhlenberg – abut the City of Reading.

suburbs could no longer pretend that they were immune to the conditions that had long plagued the cities that they surrounded. Discussion of the issues related to both cities and "suburban sprawl" began to appear in the mass media and on the national agenda. "Regionalism" became the term describing the concept that all communities of a given region need to function as a single entity in order for that region to manage its development efficiently, to compete successfully in the modern economy, and to address complex social issues. In Pennsylvania particularly, where land use is regulated at the municipal level, regionalism and growth management were viewed as closely related issues. Regionalism was also seen by many as a way for central cities to regain the regional pre-eminence that they held before the American landscape was transformed by the limited-access highway.

Berks County[4] has not escaped the national trends of urban decline and suburban expansion. While the City of Reading provides the most obvious example, "urban" problems like declining property values and drug-related crimes are found in the County's small towns. For most of its 250-year history, Reading had been the center of County government, the site of state and federal offices serving the County, a center of banking, transportation, entertainment, culture, industry, employment, and retail activity. Although the City still contains major elements of the County's financial, governmental and cultural activity, many industrial and commercial employers have departed – either to the suburbs or out of the region – along with a significant portion of the retail activity. The lack of growth coupled with the rising cost of providing services shows that the City is struggling to maintain a level of services and facilities originally provided under very different conditions.

Concerned residents from both the City and the surrounding parts of the County recognize the need for some kind of positive action. The following examples – three separate events between 1996 and 1999 – support this assertion, illustrating the growing concern regarding the condition of Reading and how it affects the region.

- In May 1996, the Berks County Community Foundation and the Reading *Eagle* co-sponsored the creation of a **Peirce Report** with the support of eleven other private sector sponsors. Reading's Pierce Report was the twelfth collaborative effort of Neal R. Pierce and Curtis W. Johnson, nationally recognized urban experts and co-authors of the book Citistates: How Urban America Can Prosper in a Competitive World. The final report was published as a supplement to the Reading Times of May 2, 1996. The introduction of that report stated that its purpose was to provide "…a wake-up call – a strong reminder that an ailing Reading is not going to get well by itself, and that unless treatment is forthcoming the disease will spread outward into the county from the infected core. … It is obvious that [Pierce and Johnson] were able to pinpoint many of Reading and Berks County's most pressing problems. It is equally obvious that their proposals should be taken seriously and become the basis for community action."

- In September 1997, nine sponsoring organizations[5] joined to convene a three-day seminar called **Growing Together: A Critical Challenge**. The stated goal of this event was "to develop strategies for action on the regional, county, and state levels" that would respond to the need to manage growth, prevent suburban sprawl and revitalize central cities in Penn-

[4] The "Reading region" should be interpreted to mean all of Berks County. This interpretation is supported by the U.S. Census Bureau, which has defined the Reading Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) as synonymous with Berks County. The County has an area of 864 square miles and estimated 1997 population of 354,057.

[5] The Berks Coalition for a Healthy Community, the Berks County Community Foundation, the Berks County Conservancy, the City of Reading, the County of Berks, GPU Energy, the Manufacturers' Association of Berks County, Sovereign Bank, and the Wyomissing Foundation.

sylvania – Reading most specifically. The keynote speaker at all of the major sessions was David Rusk, a former Mayor of Albuquerque, New Mexico (1977 – 1981) and the author of Cities Without Suburbs and other books on the topic of urban and community planning. Mr. Rusk produced a report on the County that documented the critical conditions in the City relative to the surrounding County and provided recommendations for action. At the conclusion of the seminar, the event organizers established the Growing Together Partnership as a non-profit organization committed to keeping the public aware of growth management issues and to advocate implementation of Mr. Rusk's recommendations. The Growing Together Partnership merged with the Berks County Conservancy in 1999.

- Finally, in April 1999, Sovereign Bank, the County of Berks and Albright College's Center for Local Government (now known as the Center for Community Leadership) sponsored a community leadership dinner featuring Theodore Hershberg. Mr. Hershberg is a professor at the University of Pennsylvania and a nationally recognized expert on issues of regional co-operation and education reform. In his talk, Mr. Hershberg stressed that "…regions, not cities or counties, are the units of competition…" and that regional co-operation was essential for economic success. Mr. Hershberg cited several challenges to regional co-operation, including the need to use capital resources wisely (a plea for growth management) and the necessity of helping the city at the core of the region solve its problems.

The theme of regionalism was consistent in each of these examples. Each clearly conveyed the idea that cities and suburbs need to co-operate in order to succeed. Importantly for Reading, there was complete agreement on the point that a strong region requires a strong urban core. Among community leaders from all over the County, the concept that the suburbs can thrive without the City is fading rapidly.

EXISTING CONDITIONS and ANALYSIS

The City is no longer the center of all activity in Berks County. Most residents of the outlying parts of the County now come to the City only infrequently, since shopping and entertainment venues are now readily available elsewhere. While this has an obvious impact on the vitality of the downtown area, the more critical issue is less obvious. A growing lack of familiarity with the City leads to the perception that the City is irrelevant, unnecessary, and – based upon lurid newspaper accounts – dangerous. As a result, the people who no longer need to come to the City no longer *want* to come to the City – and no longer believe that they have an interest in the success of the City. Re-connecting the City with the rest of the County is an important part of the process of promoting the concept of regionalism with the general population.

As noted above, the concept of regionalism is beginning to gain momentum in Berks County, and there are some examples of issues being addressed with a regional (or at least a multi-municipal) approach. Many communities, with the guidance and support of Berks County, are examining ways to work in co-operation. Although these efforts do not always include the City, the willingness of these municipalities to look beyond their boundaries is encouraging. Recent years have witnessed the merger of the former Borough of Temple with Muhlenberg Township and heightened interest on the part of several other small boroughs in merging with an adjoining municipality. A group of five municipalities in the western part of the County is joining to create a joint Comprehensive Plan and may consider following that with a joint municipal Zoning Ordinance. There are already several examples where two municipalities have joined to create a Comprehensive Plan. An inventory of other examples is provided below. The various examples

are classified as providing a **service**, establishing or influencing **policy**, or providing a mechanism for **planning**.

Regional Services

CITY/COUNTY INITIATIVES – City and County officials have already agreed in principle for greater County involvement in the operation of City-owned facilities that serve areas beyond the City limits. The facilities under discussion include the City library system, the Fire Training Center on Fritz's Island, and the Reading Regional Airport in Bern Township. The original incentive for this change was to assure the continued viability of these facilities in the face of the City's growing financial distress. Any higher level of efficiency that may be realized is seen as a beneficial side effect – although a significant one. In the event that these initiatives are successfully implemented, the benefits of regional-level management (and/or ownership) may lead to additional co-operative relationships of this kind.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE SYSTEM (9-1-1) – The Berks County 911 system became effective in the early 1990's. This required a high level of co-ordination among emergency service providers: the various local police departments, the State Police, local fire departments, and ambulance services. Although local jurisdictions are still respected, the precedent for effective communication has been established.

MARKETING and BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS – The Berks County Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Berks County Chamber of Commerce and the Pro-Berks Alliance are examples of City-based organizations that serve the City and the County as a single entity. This perspective has the potential to benefit Reading as these agencies work with City and surrounding municipalities on marketing and business development projects.

SOCIAL SERVICES – The majority of the social service agencies serving Berks County are based in Reading. In the past, many of these agencies – particularly employment-related agencies – were here since there was a high concentration of jobs nearby for unskilled and semi-skilled workers. This is no longer the case. The continued presence of these services reinforces the City's position as a center for the region while assuring accessibility by public transit for those requiring such services, but there is a down side: most of these agencies are tax-exempt entities, and their presence erodes the City tax base. Many of these agencies target the low-income population, which makes the City an obvious choice as a location due to the high number of low-income persons that reside here. Nevertheless, while many of the beneficiaries of these agencies are City residents, most of the agencies serve at least the entire county, and their clientele is by no means limited to City residents. This suggests that the City is bearing a cost (in lost tax revenue) to host these agencies that is more properly shared among the benefiting communities or the County as a whole.

The concentration of social services emphasizes the fact that the City accommodates a disproportionately high concentration of the County's low-income population. The availability of mass transit, the high density of development, the high concentration of residential services (shops, banks, etc.), and the relatively low cost of housing make the City an attractive location for people who do not own a car, including low-income individuals. Census data confirm this, showing that Reading has the highest proportion of low-income residents of any municipality in the County: in 1989, 19.0% of City residents were below the poverty level. And while 21.0% of all Berks County families lived in the City that year, 61.3% of the Berks County families living below the poverty level lived here. The City accommodates many low-income households that other communities are unable or unwilling to accept. Similar to what was noted in the previous

paragraph, these data indicate that the City is bearing a burden that should be more equitably distributed throughout the County.

UTILITIES – Utility corporations already evaluate efficiency and service quality using a regional perspective. This approach may benefit Reading as some of the local utilities have already shown themselves willing to assist the City and the County in a consulting capacity.

ISSUE: Reading has declined in prominence as a center of regional activity. This has resulted in a loss of vitality, particularly in the downtown area, and many individuals and businesses have become disconnected from the City.

POLICIES:

1.1 Build on the City's existing strengths as a center for finance, government, law, entertainment and culture, transportation and education. Where such uses may result in additional tax-exempt properties, the benefit to the City should be carefully balanced against the lost tax revenue.

1.2 Promote City attractions more aggressively in order to increase the number of visitors as well as to support economic development efforts.

1.3 Promote the City as a location for new facilities that are compatible with existing features and will attract visitors from the region and beyond.

ISSUE: The cost of providing certain facilities and services is rising beyond the City's capacity; furthermore, many non-City residents utilize these services and facilities. City ownership of such facilities is not essential, creates a drain on City resources, and hinders the City's ability to provide other, necessary services to its residents.

POLICIES:

1.4 Investigate divesting the City of ownership and responsibility for facilities that are more appropriately owned by another agency.

1.5 Establish dialogue with Berks County regarding some type of reimbursement from the County for tax revenue losses attributable to the presence of tax-exempt agencies that serve the County and are located in the City. The tax-exempt status of these agencies places a burden wholly upon the City in exchange for a service that benefits the entire County.

ISSUE: It may be possible to take advantage of economies of scale in order to provide municipal services more efficiently.

POLICIES:

1.6 Continue and expand current co-operative arrangements.

1.7 Initiate new efforts with neighboring municipalities and Berks County relative to the provision of public services as the capacity of those services may allow.

1.8 Evaluate the potential for providing City services to areas beyond the City limits as part of the planning process for improvements to and expansion of public services.

Existing Regionalism Policy Groups

CENTER FOR COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP (CCL) – The CCL, housed on the campus of Albright College, is an initiative of seven community-based partners: Albright College, Alvernia College, the Berks County Community Foundation, Kutztown University, the Berks-Lehigh Valley campus of Penn State University, the Reading Area Community College and the United Way of Berks County. The CCL also receives financial support from a variety of private sector sources along with its participating municipalities, including the City of Reading. The stated purpose of this organization is "…to assist the non-profit sector (both public/governmental and private) in meeting the changing needs of local communities, organizations and residents." In order to pursue its purpose, the CCL has established the Local Government Program as a forum of local government officials. Within this setting, these officials have promoted co-operative multi-municipal efforts that have benefited all concerned. These efforts have included joint purchasing of supplies (through the Berks County Co-operative Purchasing Council) and hosting seminars and workshops on topics of general interest to local governments. The CCL is an important initial step toward more meaningful regionalism, as the various participating entities become accustomed to working together in co-operative relationships.

BERKS COUNTY – In 1997, the Commissioners of Berks County established the Berks County Intergovernmental Co-operation Policy. This initiative was designed to foster multi-municipal efforts and thereby facilitate meaningful regionalism. This policy includes the following points.

- REGIONAL ZONING INCENTIVE POLICY – The County will reimburse 100% of the cost of preparing a joint Zoning Ordinance for two or more contiguous municipalities, provided that the resulting ordinance is consistent with the County Comprehensive Plan. To date, only one joint ordinance has been adopted (the Borough of Centerport with Centre Township), although several other communities are giving serious consideration. Regional zoning could be an opportunity for Reading to work in co-operation with its neighbor communities, particularly as the City is well suited to accommodate industrial uses that more rural communities are reluctant to accommodate due to traffic and other environmental impacts.
- BERKS COUNTY INTERGOVERNMENTAL NETWORK – The County will seek to establish a computer network that will link all local municipalities, authorities and school districts. Development of the network will proceed in conjunction with the County's internal efforts to link all County departments and agencies. The network will initially focus on tax assessment data, geographic information systems (GIS), zoning, infrastructure and land use information. The City could benefit from this initiative in several ways. First of all, information relative to the City and immediately surrounding areas could be easily accessible to all City departments and agencies. Furthermore, this same information would be available to members of the general public who may be considering the City as a home or business location. Finally, the inclusion of the City in this database would contribute to the perception of the City as the hub of the Berks County region.
- JOINT PUBLIC VENTURES FUND – The County will provide a 100% match to contributions from the private sector toward a fund that will be used to foster co-operative activities between local governments. Pilot projects will be selected for their potential to provide models that can be introduced to other municipalities, to create opportunities for the development of

new intergovernmental skills and experience for local officials, and to demonstrate the advantages of intergovernmental co-operation.

BERKS COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION – The BCPC, as a County agency, is an advocate of multi-municipal and regional planning, providing financial assistance for planning to partnerships of multiple municipal governments that agree to collaborate in the development of a single Comprehensive Plan covering all of their jurisdictions. As a direct result of this effort, there are more joint municipal Comprehensive Plans in Berks County than in any other County in Pennsylvania. This program has recently been expanded to fund the development of joint municipal Zoning Ordinances (see preceding paragraph).

CITIZEN INITIATIVES – A number of grass-roots organizations have identified the need for greater regional co-operation in Berks County, mending the historic rift between the City and the surrounding parts of the County. These groups include the Berks Coalition for a Healthy Community, the Berks County Conservancy and the Growing Together Partnership, which recently merged with the Conservancy. While these groups vary in their mission and effectiveness, it is significant that the issue of regionalism is gaining currency in a wide variety of settings among various groups with different purposes and agendas.

ISSUE: Current legislation accommodates inter-municipal co-ordination, including taking a regional approach to land use and transportation planning. However, this is not widely practiced, and implementing such regional methodology requires some effort and an exercise of political will.

POLICIES:

2.1 Participate in multi-municipal projects that promote regionalism and the central role of the City.

2.2 Co-ordinate land use and transportation planning and policies with adjacent municipalities and the County.

Planning and Enabling Initiatives

READING AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY (RATS) – The RATS is a committee of City, County, and municipal officials that develop policy and recommendations relative to transportation planning in the County. This includes working with the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) on its 12-Year Program. RATS has two sub-committees: the Coordinating Committee and the Technical Committee. The former is particularly involved in assuring that transportation projects are developed with the involvement of the affected local governments and with consideration of regional impacts.

SCHUYLKILL VALLEY METRO (SVM) – The SVM project is an attempt to re-establish passenger rail service between Philadelphia and Reading.[6] The success of this effort is still uncertain, but it has already proven to be an excellent example of regional co-operation. Initiated as a joint effort of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) and the Berks Area Reading Transportation Authority (BARTA), the planning process ultimately included representatives of Berks, Chester and Montgomery Counties; the cities of Philadelphia and Read-

[6] The end of the line as currently proposed is at the VF Outlet complex, which is in Wyomissing. Since "Wyomissing" is not a familiar name to individuals from outside of this area, most of the SVM literature refers to the route as "Philadelphia to Reading," as we have done here. The plan calls for a major station in the downtown area.

ing; PennDOT; the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission; and the Federal Transit Administration, in addition to BARTA and SEPTA.

STATE ENABLING LEGISLATION – The most important tool for municipal planning in Pennsylvania is the authority granted by Pennsylvania Act 247 of 1968, the Municipalities Planning Code. This Act is the legislation enacted by the Commonwealth that grants local governments the authority to develop Comprehensive Plans, Zoning Ordinances and other types of land use regulation. Between 1988 and 1992, the Commonwealth approved three different amendments to the Act to allow joint municipal planning and zoning. Although this is a significant step, multi-municipal planning and zoning remains the exception rather than the rule. More aggressive State action will be required before planning and zoning is done meaningfully at a regional level. In July 1997, Governor Tom Ridge launched an effort to identify Pennsylvania's environmental priorities by appointing the 21st Century Environment Commission. The final report of the Commission, released in September 1998, repeatedly cited land use management issues as critical to the future well-being of the Commonwealth. The report notes that the issues of poorly controlled suburban growth, loss of prime agricultural lands, and economically distressed urban areas are all related and may all be addressed by meaningful land use planning at a regional scale. The report also recognizes the need for new State enabling legislation to facilitate regional planning more effectively.

STATE SENATE BILL 300 – This bill is currently under debate in the Pennsylvania legislature. As originally drafted, it would have provided powerful inducements to regional planning. The current version is less strong; it remains to be seen which version will eventually be passed into law.

Obstacles to More Meaningful Regionalism

In the push for a regional approach to planning and development, one must be careful not to lose sight of why local governments exist in the first place. A small jurisdiction suggests that the leaders will be closer to those who have elected them and will be more accountable and more responsive to their needs. Much of the opposition to regionalism is rooted in fear of losing this responsiveness and accountability: people fear losing their voice in government. Similarly, some local officials feel threatened by a loss of power and fear that regionalism will end with the abolition of all local governments. The City does not favor this extreme but advocates initiatives that reduce or eliminate the distorting influence of political boundaries from the decision-making process: this is what is meant by "meaningful regionalism." There are three principal obstacles to this goal; most objections to regionalism are based upon one of them.

- GOVERNANCE – As already noted, Pennsylvania's system of governance assigns considerable authority to the most local level of government, including taxing authority, building code administration and land use controls. Some local officials perceive regionalism as a threat to these powers. However, if the current push for regional-level planning continues to gain momentum, it will be reflected in the public officials who are elected. It is critical that our County Commissioners continue to recognize the importance of regionalism and to support it whenever possible. Despite their support and despite the progress noted earlier in this chapter, regional planning remains the exception in Pennsylvania and our system of governance does little to facilitate meaningful regionalism.
- TAX STRUCTURE – Since taxing authority is part of governance, this section is closely related to the one above. Local governments in Pennsylvania depend largely upon the revenue from real estate-based taxes to fund their operations. This provides incentive for all jurisdictions to encourage growth, sometimes in direct competition with a neighboring commu-

nity and often without recognizing that some types of development consume more municipal services than what the new revenue pays for. All too often, such growth is courted regardless of constraints imposed by the natural environment, the water supply and sanitary sewerage capacity, and the road network. It will be a boon to meaningful regionalism if there is an alternative to the current system of real estate-based taxation, eliminating the need for local governments to compete among each other for the development – and tax revenue – that they regard as essential to survival. One potential method to achieve this is "tax base sharing." The basic principle behind this concept is that tax revenues (or some portion of them) do not go directly to the local jurisdiction but are pooled and then divided among the participating municipalities according to some previously agreed upon formula. This concept has already had success in the Twin Cities region of Minnesota and in metropolitan Dayton, Ohio.

In addition to facilitating more logical land use patterns, a regional approach to the tax structure can address the issue of the City's diminishing development capacity. As noted in the Land Use chapter of this document, the City has very little vacant developable land, and there is a limit to what can be accommodated through renovation and adaptive re-use of existing structures. It is likely that even if all developable land is developed with a taxable use – including both development of vacant property and adaptive re-use of existing buildings – the resulting tax base may still be insufficient to resolve the City's economic crises or to support necessary municipal services. Under the current system of municipal revenue, there is no guarantee of the City's survival in the long run.

- PAROCHIALISM – This is closely related to governance and politics, but differs in that the concern is not about power as much as it is the philosophy that each municipality should be independent and "make it" on its own. Overcoming this obstacle will require public education to demonstrate the advantages of regionalism for all jurisdictions and to show that the concept is not just a thinly disguised bailout for the City.

ANALYSIS

Meaningful regionalism in Pennsylvania will require an unprecedented level of inter-municipal co-operation. Despite historic suspicions regarding multi-municipal planning and co-operation, there are a number of examples of such efforts beginning in Berks County. The rising cost of providing municipal services and the growing prominence of land use issues in the popular media and in government discussions at all levels further encourage this co-operation. Locally, there appears to be growing realization among leaders that the rural and suburban parts of the County cannot insulate themselves from problems that have traditionally been seen as "urban." Regionalism, regional planning and regional co-operation are becoming recognized as necessary for economic success for everyone, not just for the City of Reading.

Other urban areas across the country have already recognized this situation and are taking steps to address it. "Smart Growth," "Growing Greener," and similar growth management strategies are gaining recognition as ways to combat the poor planning that often accompanies the low-density development pattern of the suburbs called "sprawl." These issues are even gaining attention at the federal level – which is remarkable since land use management has historically been a local issue.

Finally, State and Federal legislators are realizing the need for enabling legislation that will not merely allow multi-municipal planning, but will effectively encourage it. The most recent

amendments to the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code and Senate Bill 300 are the first, if tentative, steps in this direction.

While land use planning may be the most highly visible evidence of regionalism, it is not limited to land use. Meaningful regionalism will result in more equitable taxation, a more logical provision of services and infrastructure, and a higher overall quality of life for all residents of the region. It may also facilitate the end of an "us-against-them" mentality in the discussion of urban, suburban, and rural issues. Reading will take the opportunities to advance or to initiate regional and multi-municipal efforts as they may arise.

ISSUE: A number of legislators at the County, State and Federal levels recognize the need for meaningful regional planning.

POLICIES:

3.1 Keep informed about proposed legislation and programs being developed by higher levels of government, offering input where possible and official support where appropriate.

3.2 Act as an advocate for enabling legislation and other actions at higher levels of government that facilitate meaningful regional land use planning and control.

3.3 Maintain communication with the City's State and Federal representatives to keep them informed of the City's needs and the City's position relative to new legislation affecting the issues surrounding regionalism.

APPENDIX A

THE STRATEGIC PLANNING MODEL

Planning documents are too often viewed as a collection of good intentions that never seem to happen. Despite the better-than-average track record of such plans in Reading, the City's plan-

ners wanted to assure the usefulness of the final product. A recent development in planning theory would provide a way to do this: strategic planning. Traditional plans, following what is known as the rational planning model, contain an inventory of existing conditions followed by a series of general goal statements indicating municipal policy. Each goal is supported by one or more objectives. Objectives are generally understood to be specific, well-defined actions to be implemented in pursuit of the stated goal. The best plans would also state who should be responsible for implementation of each objective and give an indication of the desired timing. If the goals were too vague, there was no way to tell if any success was due to the strength of the plan or just dumb luck. Furthermore, there were no alternatives to pursue if the implementation of the objectives failed to move the community toward its goals.

The strategic planning model builds on the foundation of the rational model. Strategic planning maintains the structure of goals and objectives, but objectives are often broken down into a series of "action steps." Responsibility for execution of each of these steps is clearly indicated, and a time schedule is provided as well. Perhaps the most crucial difference is in that the strategic model provides a method to *measure* the success of the plan.

The strategic model requires that plan goals be stated so that they are *measurable* or *quantifiable.* This forces the creation of a more useful goal statement. It also makes the planner consider why the goal is important to the community and what conditions exist that resulted in that particular goal statement. So even before a goal statement is crafted, it is necessary for the community to identify general *issues.* An example is useful here: one issue that residents mentioned frequently during the public input phase was a general lack of pride in the City. While there may be universal agreement that this is a problem in the City, "increase civic pride" is not a particularly helpful objective. The question then becomes how we can *measure* civic pride. Our Quality of Life task force considered this issue and decided that one possible *indicator* of civic pride was the number of active neighborhood organizations in the City. The identification of indicators allows us to measure both current conditions (how many active neighborhood organizations exist today) as well as our progress – or lack thereof – over time toward resolution of the issue. It allows us to establish clear goals: how many neighborhood organizations should there be? And by when should they be established? Finally, it will give us a clue as to what actions should be taken: what should we do to foster the creation of new neighborhood organizations?

Note that the indicator does not usually tell *how* to achieve the goal; it is only a measurement. Once an indicator is selected, a benchmark date and value is established. This is the standard against which future measurements will be compared. At the same time, a target value for the indicator is also determined, usually with some target date as well. This target is a quantifiable expression of the goal. So sustainable planning not only allows us to state community goals as quantifiable values but also enables us to measure progress toward those goals.

THE PLANNING PROCESS IN READING

From the very beginning, the City wanted to assure that the process for the new Comprehensive Plan would include a high level of public participation. In addition, the Plan had to comply with the State regulations in Act 247 as well as be a useful document.

The process began in earnest when the Mayor of Reading appointed a Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee. The committee chair was the chairperson of the City Planning Commission and included several members of the Planning Commission in addition to City residents and

business people and a representative of City Council. The Advisory Committee met for the first time in November 1997 and began their work by developing a process for public input.

First phase: Initial public input – The desire to be as inclusive as possible in the public outreach had to be balanced with the constraints imposed by time, budget, and the number of staff persons in the City Planning Office. The Committee eventually decided on a three-part outreach effort. The most important of these was a series of neighborhood meetings to be held throughout the City. The idea was to rely upon existing neighborhood organizations as far as possible; where no active organizations existed, the Planning Office staff would identify an appropriate meeting place and convene the meeting. This strategy proved quite successful. Planning Office staff made contact with a large number of neighborhood groups, explained our intention, and asked for a place on the agenda of their next meeting. Where active organizations did not exist, staff found that neighborhood churches were often more than willing to assist by providing meeting space as well as doing some publicity. The Reading School District also assisted by providing meeting space in schools.

All meetings had the same format. Trained volunteers provided by the Berks Coalition for a Healthy Community served as meeting facilitators, and staff from the City Planning Office assisted. This arrangement was used in order to provide a trained meeting facilitator for each session who was not a City employee (in order to lend impartiality to the meeting) along with an individual who *was* a City staffer and could speak on the City's behalf if necessary. At each meeting, those in attendance were asked what they liked about their neighborhood and the City generally, what they did not like and wanted to get rid of, and what they would change. All responses were written down on flip charts. At the conclusion of this part of the meeting, those attending were given 21 self-adhesive paper dots: seven for each of the three categories. People were then asked to vote for the issues of greatest concern to them by placing one or more of these dots on the chart page next to that issue. Attendees were specifically instructed to limit themselves to seven votes per category[7], but they could "vote" for any issue within a category as many times as they wished. This allowed us to identify the most pressing concerns of each group. Between January and May of 1998, 27 meetings were held with a total attendance of approximately 575.

Realizing that not everyone would be able to attend a meeting, the three basic questions – what should the City work to keep, what should we get rid of, what should we change – were reproduced on a brief survey form. The form also included a place for respondents to indicate whether or not they were a City resident. Although we were chiefly interested in hearing from our own residents and business people, we realized that the perspective of non-residents could also be useful. Responses from non-residents were counted but kept separate from residents' responses. The survey form was utilized for the remaining two outreach efforts. One such effort had copies of the survey placed at drop-boxes at fourteen locations throughout the City. Equipped with a pencil and a quantity of forms, the drop boxes were placed where they were accessible to the public – and where a writing surface was available. Drop box locations included each of the four library branches in the City, the main Post Office branch, various banks, and other community centers. The remaining outreach was achieved with the assistance of our local newspaper, the Reading *Eagle/Times.* The paper printed the form in its entirety on four separate occasions, with the invitation to submit it via mail, one of the drop boxes, or in person at the Planning Office in City Hall. We received a total of approximately 500 forms from the drop boxes and the newspaper printings. Public contact would be maintained by a quarterly newslet-

[7] After the first few meetings, staff color-coded the dots to assure that those attending adhered to this restriction.

ter that would provide updates on progress to those who had attended the meetings as well as to anyone else who asked to be added to the mailing list.

At the conclusion of the initial public input phase, Planning Office staff reviewed and analyzed all of the responses. We were not surprised to find that a number of issues were raised at more than one; some issues appeared to be nearly universal. The total tally of responses from these meetings is provided in the appendix of this document. In order to help the analysis, the responses were grouped by topic. The office identified ten topics:

- Business
- Community
- Education
- Government
- Housing
- Physical environment
- Quality of life & culture
- Recreation & leisure
- Security
- Transportation

Although there was some inevitable overlap of these topical areas, they proved quite useful. The input from the meetings was combined along with the survey results to identify the issues that were of greatest concern to City residents and business owners. City planners would make sure that the Comprehensive Plan addressed the most frequently noted concerns.

The Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee agreed from the beginning that the City could benefit from the expertise of local community leaders as well as the interest of "regular" citizens. Since such people would be volunteers, there was the question of how to provide them with meaningful direction to assure that they would not waste time trying to define their task. The information collected from the initial public input phase and organized by the Planning Office staff provided the necessary focus.

Second phase: Task Forces – The Advisory Committee asked the Mayor to appoint six citizen task forces with the mission of developing a strategic plan for each topical area identified by the Planning Office. The Committee and the Planning Office staff agreed that one task force for each topic was unnecessary: some topics had only a few issues; others were obviously closely related to each other. Furthermore, the task force phase promised to be logistically complicated, so there was an incentive to reduce the number of task forces as much as possible without affecting the quality of the final product. Each task force included at least one member of the Advisory Committee, one member of the City Planning Commission, and one staff person from the City Community Development Department. The topics originally identified above were assigned to the following Task Forces.

- Business and Work Force Development Task Force – Addressed business and education issues. Originally known as "Business and Education" the task force elected to change their name to reflect that the intention of education was to create a skilled work force. This revision also reflected their concern for education in a broad sense,

not purely an academic one. This task force included local business people, representatives of organized labor, and representatives from local educational institutions such as the Reading School District and Reading Area Community College.

- Housing Task Force – Addressed housing issues. This relatively small group included a representative of the Reading Housing Authority and other individuals familiar with the housing needs of the City, particularly among low-income individuals.
- Land Use and Transportation Task Force – Addressed issues classified under physical environment and transportation. This group included representatives of the local construction community, the Berks County Planning Commission, and BARTA.
- Quality of Life Task Force – Addressed the issues classified under the headings of community, quality of life and culture, and security. This was the largest task force and addressed the widest range of concerns. Fairly early in the process, they divided into three committees: Alive & Rich, Clean & Beautiful, and Safe & Quiet. Each committee produced its own report.
- Recreation and Leisure Task Force – Addressed issues related to recreation and leisure. This topic would seem appropriate for inclusion with the Quality of Life group, but it was kept separate. This was because the City's Public Works Department (which includes the Parks and Recreation Divisions) was planning to develop a comprehensive Park & Open Space Plan. Public Works' plan would go into much more detail than would be appropriate for a Comprehensive Plan, but we wanted to be sure that two documents complemented each other and did not duplicate or – worse – contradict each other. We anticipated that the Public Works plan would examine each City facility and City program in detail and make recommendations. For the Comprehensive Plan, this task force was directed to focus on policy: defining the purpose of the City's parks and recreational programs. In addition, they were directed to consider "recreation" in a broad sense, including tourism and leisure activities.
- Regionalism Task Force – Broadly, one could say that this task force addressed the issues under the category of "government." In addition to these concerns, there were others, not specifically mentioned at any of the neighborhood meetings. This task force was established to consider the role of the City of Reading within the larger region. It is increasingly apparent that no community exists completely within its own borders, but all are part of a larger, interdependent network of communities. Changing technology in transportation and communication make people less dependent upon their immediate community to satisfy their needs and desires. Changing fashions and tastes mean that people are demanding greater variety and greater specialization. It is no longer possible to consider the City independent of the surrounding County – actually that was never possible, but that observation is no longer a theory of planning but a readily observable condition. The task force on regionalism was charged with the task of identifying means by which Reading could regain preeminence in the region. This task force was one of the smaller groups, including representatives of Berks County and the local development industry.

The task forces began their work at a plenary "kick-off" meeting held at Reading Area Community College in September 1999. Each task force member was supplied with a summary of the input from the neighborhood meetings, general information on comprehensive planning, and a mission: to identify the most critical issues from among the citizen concerns and to develop policies and the foundation of a strategic plan that would address those concerns. Our desire to use

a strategic planning approach was greatly assisted by a March 1998 program sponsored by the Berks Coalition for a Healthy Community. This program introduced the concept of indicators to the larger community. In addition, Alan Atkisson, the principal speaker for this program and an internationally known expert on the concept of sustainable planning, provided useful guidelines for the development of appropriate indicators. This program generated sufficient interest on the part of the Healthy Communities participants that the organization initiated a project to develop a series of indicators for Berks County. Since a number of individuals who assisted with this Comprehensive Plan also worked on the Healthy Communities initiative, it is not surprising that there is a certain consonance between the City and the County efforts.

We intended to give the task forces as much freedom as possible, hoping that this would foster greater creativity. After the task forces had worked at their own paces for several months, we began to realize that the "creative" freedom we allowed was creating such a diversity of product, that the final reports would not be sensible as a single document. Near the mid-point of the task force phase, the facilitator of the Land Use and Transportation task force developed a worksheet that set forth the process in a graphic form in an effort to clarify the process for her group. This proved to be so successful that it was modified (slightly) and distributed to the other task forces for their use. A sample of this worksheet has been provided at the end of this chapter. This proved enormously helpful in getting the diverse groups to organize their work in a way that allowed compilation of the different reports into a single, unified document. Even the groups that did not use the worksheets for their final reports gained a clearer understanding of what they were expected to produce. The process recommended to each task force was as follows.

1. First, discuss the issues identified in the public input phase and prioritize, determining which issues are most critical. Focus effort on top two or three issues; examine others as time may allow.
2. Develop a policy statement that addresses the selected issues. Policy statements indicate a general direction of City action, and should begin with the words, "The City will…" or "The City should…".
3. Once policy statements had been established, the task forces were directed to consider appropriate goals that would support those policies. The goal statements were to be definite, quantifiable actions: things to be accomplished or a state to be achieved within some specific time. At this same time, we directed the task forces to begin thinking about how success could be measured. That is, what would be appropriate indicators for the goals they identified. Each task was to develop a list of goals and indicators for each policy statement. We had hoped that some of the groups would have the time to determine the benchmark values of their chosen indicators, but none did. Even so, the work that was accomplished was significant.
4. The final step for the task forces was to develop a strategy to achieve the first-priority goals that they had identified. The strategy was to include "action steps" (also called "tasks" or "milestones") to be performed in pursuit of each specified goal. We asked them to be as precise as possible, identifying a person or organization that would ideally be responsible for each action step as well as when it should be completed.

In reviewing the demands that we placed upon our volunteers, it seems amazing that anyone actually stuck with the process. That we had such a large group of individuals who took the job seriously and thoughtfully seems almost miraculous: we recognize the huge debt of gratitude that we owe them.

The Planning Office staff compiled the task force reports into a document appropriately entitled "Final Report of the Task Forces." This document was unveiled at a celebratory event held at Reading Area Community College in early June of 1999. While everyone involved knew that this report was not in itself a plan – and that the final plan document would not necessarily incorporate all of the task force recommendations – we felt strongly that those recommendations needed to be set forth in their original form in order that the work of the task forces would be recognized. From the beginning, we understood that the Planning Office staff would bear the responsibility of combining the task force work with other research in order to create a document that met the requirements for a Comprehensive Plan as established by the State in Act 247.

During the summer of 1999, staff worked to develop a format for the final document, to identify what work remained outstanding, and to develop meaningful indicators where the task forces had been unable to do so. We also noted that the Comprehensive Park and Open Space Plan proposed by the City's Department of Public Works had failed to materialize as anticipated. This eliminated any reason for maintaining the work of the Recreation and Leisure task force as a separate chapter; the recreation element was relocated to the new chapter on community facilities and services while the leisure element was incorporated into the Quality of Life chapter.

Using only Planning Office staff for the final research, analysis, and editing tasks caused this phase to take much longer than originally anticipated. The loss of some of the Planning staff exacerbated this problem. At this point, the Advisory Committee determined that the final document should be split into two volumes: a Comprehensive Plan that met all state requirements and a Strategic Action Plan that would contain the sustainable planning component of indicators. The document that you are now reading is the first volume of what is envisioned as a two-volume work that will provide for the continuing growth and development of the City of Reading.

INITIAL PUBLIC IN-PUT: DROP-BOX AND NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING LOCATIONS

DROP BOXES

- **A** First Union (formerly Meridian) Bank, 13th St. & Rockland St.
- **B** Reading Public Library, Northeast Branch, 11th St. & Pike St.
- **C** Big John's Restaurant, 1316 Schuylkill Ave.
- **D** Reading Public Library, Northwest Branch, Schuylkill Ave. & Windsor St.

E AllFirst Bank (formerly Bank of Pennsylvania), 2nd St. & Spring St.

F Commonwealth Bank, 956 N. 9th St.

G Neighborhood Housing Services, 383 Schuylkill Ave.

H Police Athletic League, 325 Walnut St.

I City Hall, 815 Washington St.

J Post Office, 5th St. & Washington St.

K Commonwealth Bank, 445 Penn St.

L Reading Public Library, Main Branch, 5th St. & Franklin St.

M Reading Public Library, Southeast Branch, Perkiomen Ave. & 15th St.

N Commonwealth Bank, 830 Lancaster Ave.

NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING LOCATIONS

MAP No.	LOCATION	DATE(S)	ATTEND.
1	Big John's Restaurant 1316 Schuylkill Ave.	2/24/98	55
2	Glenside Homes Community Building	3/3/98	0
3	Keffer Park Field House	4/21/98	5

	301 Exeter St.		
4	Riverside Elementary School 1400 Centre Ave.	3/4/98	9
5	Thirteenth & Union Elementary School 13th & Union Sts.	3/25/98	43
6	Twelfth & Marion Elementary School 12th & Marion Sts.	3/18/98	1
7	Grace Bible Fellowship Church 1128 Hampden Blvd.	2/19/98	22
8	Historical Society of Berks County 940 Centre Ave.	3/4/98	37
9	Olivet Boys' & Girls' Club 677 Clinton St.	2/17/98	6
10	Hope Lutheran Church Front & Greenwich Sts.	1/20/98	31
11	Thirteenth & Green Elementary School 13th & Green Sts.	3/24/98	13
12	St. Luke's Church 9th & Green Sts.	1/17/98	15
13	Tenth & Green Elementary School 10th & Green Sts.	3/10/98	18
14	La Casa de la Amistad 4th & Walnut Sts.	1/27/98	16
15	City Hall 815 Washington St.	4/15/98 5/5/98 5/7/98	15 16 13
16	Reading Area Community College	4/22/98	25
17	Central Park United Methodist Church 138 S. 6th St.	1/28/98	15
18	Third & Spruce Recreational Center 3rd & Spruce Sts.	4/23/98	8
19	St. Peter the Apostle Roman Catholic Church 326 S. 5th St.	3/11/98	38
20	Iglesia de Cristo Misionera 834 Chestnut St.	2/18/98	11
21	Reading Public Library, Southeast Branch Perkiomen Ave. & 15th St.	2/25/98	33
22	Sixteenth & Haak Elementary School 16th & Haak Sts.	3/3/98	15
23	Hessian Camp Town Watch	5/6/98	20
24	Holy Name High School Wyomissing Blvd. & Parkside Dr.	3/12/98	6
25	Millmont Elementary School 400 Summit Ave.	3/5/98	31
26	Albright College	3/10/98	50

PARTNERSHIP FOR THE FUTURE: ***Strategic Plan Worksheet***

STEP ONE: STATE THE ISSUE

STEP TWO: STATE THE POLICY

STEP THREE: IDENTIFY INDICATOR(S) AND BENCHMARK(S)

INDICATOR:	**INDICATOR BENCHMARK(S):**

STEP FOUR: STATE GOAL, MAKING REFERENCE TO BENCHMARK (goal must be quantifiable)

STEP FIVE: IDENTIFY STRATEGY, INCLUDING MILESTONE(S)

STRATEGY:	**MILESTONE(S):**

APPENDIX B

Task Force Members

Land Use / Transportation

Ms. Marcia Goodman Hinnershitz, facilitator Council on Chemical Abuse

Ms. Cheryl Auchenbach	Berks County Planning Commission
Mr. Joseph Dolan	Dolan Construction
Mr. Charles Fairchild	Reading Planning Commission
Mr. Michael Fiucci	Reading City Council
Mr. John Giardiello	Engineering Office/City of Reading
Mr. Karl Graybill	Planning Office/City of Reading
Mr. Joseph Griffin	Oley Institute
Ms. Melissa Hauck	Zoning Office/City of Reading
Mr. Walter Hawley	Reading Redevelopment Authority
Mr. Joseph Hoffman	Berks County Conservancy
Ms. Charlotte Huntley	Services Division Manager/City of Reading
Mr. Philip Oropesa	Reading Parking Authority (formerly)
Mr. John Reinhart	Reading Regional Airport Authority
Mr. Fritz Rothermel	Planning Office/City of Reading
Mr. Richard Siggins	Resident
Mr. William Vitale	Designworks Architects
Ms. Janet Weiss	BARTA

Recreation and Leisure

Mr. Neil Anderson, facilitator	YMCA
Ms. Carol Robertson, facilitator	Recreation Division/City of Reading
Ms. Debbie Bertolet	Berks County Parks & Recreation Department
Ms. Jacqueline Bombay	Parks & Recreation Advisory Committee
Mr. Richard DeGroote	Olivet Boys & Girls Club
Mr. Les Jones	GPU Energy
Mr. Stanley Papademetriou	Reading Planning Commission
Ms. Cathy Wegener	Berks County Heritage Center
Ms. Sandra Wise	Police Athletic League (PAL)
Ms. Amy Woldt	Planning Office/City of Reading
Mr. Kyle Zeiber	Department of Parks/City of Reading

Housing

Mr. Eric Galosi, facilitator	Housing Resource Center/City of Reading
Mr. Tom Brogan	Albright College
Mr. Gordon Griffiths	Phoebe Ministries
Mr. Daniel F. Luckey	Reading Housing Authority
Mr. Ronald Miller	Neighborhood Housing Services
Mr. Ed Palka	Reading Planning Commission
Mr. William Richardson	Berks Community Action Program

Business and Work Force Development

Mr. Chester Winters, facilitator	First Union Bank
Mr. Tony Consentino	Reading Water Authority
Ms. Lucy Cortez	Sovereign Bank
Mr. Patrick Feeley	Junior Achievement
Mr. Doug Fisher	Pagoda Printing
Dr. Rubén Flores	Reading School District
Mr. Barry Jackson	YMCA

Mr. David Johnson	Business Resource Center/City of Reading
Ms. Jill Mahon	Kutztown University EDGE Center
Ms. Ruth Mathews	United Community Services for Working Families
Mr. Tom McMahon	Entech Engineering
Mr. Lawrence Murin	United Labor Council
Mr. Ermete Raffaelli	Reading Planning Commission
Mr. Ralph Rhode	GPU Energy
Mr. Bernie Riley	Berks County Chamber of Commerce
Mr. Fritz Rothermel	Planning Office/City of Reading
Mr. Walt Schwenger	Berks County Bank
Mr. Ed Swoyer	Greater Berks Development Fund
Mr. Joe Templin	Drumar Development
Ms. Gail Dawson White	Sovereign Bank (formerly)
Dr. Gust Zogas	Reading Area Community College (RACC)

Quality of Life

Ms. Terry Knox Ramseur, facilitator	United Way of Berks County
Ms. Yvette Santiago, facilitator	Human Relations Council
Major Raymond Bartholomew	The Salvation Army
Ms. Beth Bitler	Reading Urban Ministry
Lt. Lionel Carter	Police Department/City of Reading
Ms. Barbara Coffin	Berks County Office of Aging
Ms. Kayte Connelly	Berks Arts Council
Ms. Michelle Doleniak	Reading Volunteer Crime Watch
Mr. Dan Gallagher	Penn's Commons Neighbors
Ms. Jennifer Gober	Planning Office/City of Reading
Ms. Mary Gonzalez	Rural Opportunities, Inc.
Ms. Anna Hehn	Shade Tree Commission
Rev. Calvin Kurtz	Reading-Berks Conference of Churches
Mr. Mike Lauter	Reading Planning Commission
Ms. Robin Royer	Downtown Improvement District
Ms. Toni Livingston	Reading Beautification, Inc. (formerly)
Sgt. Stanley McCarty	Crime Prevention Unit/ Reading Police
Mr. James Miller	Berks County Senior Citizens Council
Mr. Chris Miller	Historical Architectural Review Board
Ms. Donna Reed	Resident
Ms. Ann Sheehan	Berks Community Television
Mr. John Slifko	Clean City Coordinating Committee
Mr. Kendell A. TeSelle	Children's Home of Reading
Mr. Andy Wagner	Reading Volunteer Crime Watch

Regionalism

Mr. John Kramer, facilitator	Center for Local Government
Mr. Eric Jenkins	Growing Together Partnership (formerly)
Mr. Glen R. Knoblauch	Berks County Planning Commission
Mr. Rick McDougal	Burkey Group, Inc.
Mr. Tom McKeon	Berks County Department of Community and

	Economic Development
Mr. Neil Nemeth	Community Development Office/City of Reading

APPENDIX C

REQUIREMENTS OF ACT 247, THE MUNICIPALITIES PLANNING CODE

The Comprehensive Plan is one of the basic planning documents established by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania that may be created and adopted by local governments. The legislation that grants this power is Pennsylvania Act 247 of 1968, as amended, the Municipalities Planning

Code. Act 247 requires Comprehensive Plans to address all parts of the municipality and to include the following elements as a minimum.

- A ***statement of objectives*** of the municipality concerning its future development.
- A ***plan for land use***, which may include provisions for the amount, intensity, character, and timing of land use proposed for residence, industry, business, agriculture, major traffic and transit facilities, utilities, community facilities, public grounds, parks and recreation, and other areas of special concern.
- A **plan to meet the housing needs** of present residents and of those individuals and families anticipated to reside in the municipality, which may include conservation of presently sound housing, rehabilitation of housing in declining neighborhoods and the accommodation of expected new housing in different dwelling types and at appropriate densities for households of all income levels.
- A **plan for the movement of people and goods**.
- A **plan for community facilities and utilities**, which may include public and private education, recreation, municipal buildings, fire and police stations, libraries, hospitals, water supply and distribution, sewerage and waste treatment, and other similar facilities and uses.
- A **statement of the interrelationships among the various plan components**, which may include an estimate of the environmental, energy conservation, fiscal, economic development, and social consequences on the municipality.
- A discussion of **short- and long-range plan implementation strategies**, which may include implications for capital improvements programming, new or updated development regulations, and identification of public funds potentially available.
- A statement indicating the **relationship** of the existing and proposed development of the municipality **to the existing and proposed development and plans in contiguous municipalities**, to the objectives and plans for development in the county of which it is a part, and to regional trends.

In addition to these required elements, a Comprehensive Plan may include any other elements that the community believes necessary in order to have a useful document. The Plan need not be limited to physical aspects of the community but may address “quality of life” issues as well.

The Comprehensive Plan is designed to serve as the policy foundation for the planning and development activities that follow. Applications for financial assistance from the state or federal government often require the applying jurisdiction to indicate if the project to be funded complies with an adopted Comprehensive Plan. In addition, case law has established precedents whereby decisions made by local bodies (City Council, Planning Commission, Zoning Hearing Board, and so on) and subsequently challenged by an aggrieved party are often upheld where it can be demonstrated that the decisions were consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. Despite this level of influence, an adopted Comprehensive Plan is *not* an actual regulation with the force of law. If the Plan recommends that the City take some specific action at a given time, the City will incur no legal liability for failure to implement that action. Although the Plan would be weakened by such an eventuality, it would not be voided, nor would there be any basis for legal action against the City.

APPENDIX D